



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS

TUESDAY – 27 SEP 2022



	International	National	Regional and Local
Events, Opportunities Go to articles	09/27 Day 216 of the Russia invasion 09/27 Russia's new nuclear warning 09/27 War at dangerous tipping point 09/27 Russian men fleeing conscription 09/27 Russian conscripts face hard times 09/27 Russia draft: Ukrainians vs Ukrainians? 09/27 Russians pay private planes evade draft 09/27 Europe eyes sabotage for pipelines leaks 09/27 Germany: leaks Nord Stream gas pipelines 09/27 Haiti facing 'humanitarian catastrophe' 09/27 Myanmar confronts a mounting, hidden toll 09/26 Russia admits to military draft problems 09/26 US Navy most advanced warship in Asia 09/26 Uganda Ebola infections, deaths grow 09/26 World Bank cuts China growth forecast 09/26 Leading economies sliding into recession 09/26 Iran women center stage anti-govt protests 09/26 Canada drops mask requirement on planes 09/26 Philippines to shut offshore gambling firms	09/27 Monkeypox recedes, uncertainty lingers 09/27 Federal data: too few teacher applicants 09/27 Teacher, staff shortages in half of schools 09/27 Super-rich in US did not get richer 2022 09/27 Lumber prices back to pre-Covid levels 09/27 Border surge sends smuggling prices up 09/27 Families brace for large winter heating bill 09/27 Avert government shutdown this Saturday? 09/27 Ian major hurricane; Florida in sights 09/26 Covid questions still pending answers 09/26 CDC: no masks required health care sites 09/26 Russia citizenship to Edward Snowden 09/26 CG: China, Russia naval ships off Alaska 09/26 Worker protests at airports across country 09/26 CBO: cancel student loan debt \$400B cost 09/26 NOAA: Atlantic storms grow stronger faster 09/26 Gulf Coast region vulnerable to storm surge	09/26 Ex-Seattle firefighters sue city, chief 09/26 Seattle-Vancouver BC Amtrak service 09/26 Vax no longer required to enter Canada 09/26 Gas prices rise in Washington 09/26 Spain knights a Seattle woman 09/26 Bolt Creek fire closes portions US 2 09/26 Spokane weather balloons aid Ian forecast
Cyber, Tech Awareness Go to articles	09/27 Ukraine's internet army of 'NAFO Fellas' 09/27 Study: firms face 51 incidents each day 09/27 NKorea hackers exploit unsolicited jobs 09/26 Australia police probe hacker's demand 09/26 Bot network fake porn to fool Facebook 09/26 Russia planning cyberattacks energy grid 09/26 Hackers leak French hospital patients data 09/26 Chinese espionage hackers target Tibetans	09/26 New Erbium password stealing malware 09/26 PowerPoint 'mouseover' malware delivery	
Terrorism, Extremism Go to articles	09/27 Afghanistan money, economy crumbles 09/27 Kurdish militants attack Turkish police 09/26 Somalia fights terrorists w/US support 09/26 Militant Islamist violence in the Sahel	09/26 ISIS: US 'banana republic' for Islamic storm 09/26 US frees Taliban drug trafficker on 'kill' list 09/26 Activist targeted pipeline sentenced 6yrs	
Suspicious, Unusual Go to articles	09/27 Pipeline expansion endangers climate?	09/26 Success! NASA first planetary defense test	09/26 Drones over stadiums delay football games
Crime, Criminals Go to articles		09/27 Stores lock up goods to fight theft 09/27 Chicago cops shoot police facility intruder	09/26 Ex-Nigeria official jailed 5yrs: fraud scams 09/26 Bomb threat shuts portion SR 20 for hours

[DISCLAIMER and FAIR USE Notice](#)

Events, Opportunities

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Russia's new nuclear warning
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/ukraine-annexation-votes-end-amid-russian-mobilisation-exodus-2022-09-26/
GIST	<p>LONDON/ZAPORIZHZHIA, Ukraine, Sept 27 (Reuters) - An ally of President Vladimir Putin issued a stark new nuclear warning to Ukraine and the West on Tuesday as referendums billed by Russia as a prelude to it annexing four Ukrainian regions entered their fifth and final day.</p> <p>Moscow's latest broadside came as European countries rushed to investigate unexplained leaks in two Russian natural gas pipelines under the Baltic Sea which will hinder efforts to restart the main line taking Russian gas to Germany.</p>

The Kremlin, which has blamed technical problems for earlier cuts in Russian gas supplies to Europe, said it could not rule out sabotage, but did not say by whom and called for an investigation.

Russia's confrontation with the West has driven up global inflation and sharpened energy and food crises in many countries since its Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine, which was met by tough Western sanctions and Russian retaliatory measures.

Tuesday's nuclear warning by Dmitry Medvedev, deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council, is one of several issued by Putin and his associates in recent weeks.

Analysts say they are designed to deter Ukraine and the West by hinting at a readiness to use tactical nuclear weapons to defend newly annexed territory, where Russian forces have faced strong Ukrainian counteroffensives in recent weeks.

Medvedev's warning differed from earlier ones in that he predicted for the first time that the NATO military alliance would not risk a nuclear war and directly enter the Ukraine war even if Moscow struck Ukraine with nuclear weapons.

"I believe that NATO would not directly interfere in the conflict even in this scenario," Medvedev said in a post on Telegram.

"The demagogues across the ocean and in Europe are not going to die in a nuclear apocalypse."

'SHAM' REFERENDUMS

Voting on whether to join Russia in four Ukrainian regions partly controlled by Moscow -- Kherson, Luhansk, Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia -- entered its fifth and final day. The West has said it will not recognise the outcome of what it regards as illegal sham referendums.

Russian government officials have repeatedly warned they might use nuclear weapons to defend the new territory if Kyiv's forces, who are already in control of some of it, try to take what Moscow says it will soon regard as its sovereign territory.

NATO and the United States have not detailed publicly how they would respond to a Russian nuclear attack on Ukraine, but Jake Sullivan, White House national security adviser, told CBS on Sunday that Washington had spelled out to Moscow what he described as "catastrophic consequences" for Russia.

Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak said in an interview with Swiss newspaper Blick that Ukraine was preparing for the possibility of a Russian nuclear strike, but said the onus was on nuclear-armed states to deter Russia.

"...Where exactly should we evacuate people in the event of a Russian nuclear strike against Ukraine?" he asked. "That is why the use of nuclear weapons is a question of global security - this is no longer just about Ukraine."

Podolyak said in the same interview that Ukrainians who had helped Russia organise the annexation referendums would face treason charges and at least five years in jail.

"We have lists of names of people who have been involved in some way," he said, adding that Ukrainians who were forced to vote would not be punished. Ukrainians officials have reported ballot boxes being taken door to door and residents being coerced into voting in front of Russian troops.

None of the provinces are fully under Moscow's control and fighting has been under way along the entire front line, with Ukrainian forces reporting more advances since they routed Russian troops in a fifth province, Kharkiv, earlier this month.

The British Ministry of Defence said on Tuesday that Putin was likely to announce the accession of the occupied regions to the Russian Federation during an address to parliament on Sept. 30.

'SEVERE FIGHTING'

Ukrainian and Russian forces were locked in heavy fighting in different parts of Ukraine on Tuesday.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said the Donetsk region in the east remained his country's -- and Russia's -- top strategic priority, with "particularly severe" fighting engulfing several towns as Russian troops try to advance to the south and west.

Pavlo Kyrylenko, the regional governor, said three civilians had been killed and 13 wounded in the Donetsk region in the past 24 hours.

There were also reported clashes in the Kharkiv region in the northeast -- focus of a Ukrainian counter-offensive this month.

And Ukrainian forces pressed on with a campaign to keep bridges and other river crossings out of action to disrupt supply lines to Russian forces in the south.

A Reuters reporter in the city of Zaporizhzhia saw a huge crater next to a restaurant on Khortytsia Island and workers disentangling power lines and trees. The restaurant owner said nobody had been hurt in the overnight strike.

The Ukrainian Air Force said on Tuesday it had shot down three Iranian-made drones operated by Russia after an attack on the Mykolaiv region.

Reuters could not immediately verify battlefield reports.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Europe eyes sabotage for pipelines leaks
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/mystery-gas-leaks-hit-major-russian-undersea-gas-pipelines-europe-2022-09-27/
GIST	<p>STOCKHOLM/COPENHAGEN, Sept 27 (Reuters) - Europe was racing on Tuesday to investigate possible sabotage behind sudden and unexplained leaks in two Russian gas pipelines under the Baltic Sea, infrastructure at the heart of an energy crisis since Russia invaded Ukraine.</p> <p>Poland's Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said the leaks were caused by sabotage, while Denmark's prime minister and Russia, which slashed its gas deliveries to Europe after Western sanctions, said it could not be ruled out. But who might be behind any foul play, if proven, and a motive were far from clear.</p> <p>Sweden's Maritime Authority issued a warning about two leaks in the Nord Stream 1 pipeline, the day after a leak on the nearby Nord Stream 2 pipeline was discovered that prompted Denmark to restrict shipping and impose a small no fly zone.</p> <p>Both pipelines have been flashpoints in an escalating energy war between European capitals and Moscow that has pummelled major Western economies, sent gas prices soaring and sparked a hunt for alternative energy supplies.</p> <p>"Today we faced an act of sabotage, we don't know all the details of what happened, but we see clearly that it's an act of sabotage, related to the next step of escalation of the situation in Ukraine," Mateusz Morawiecki said during the opening of a new pipeline between Norway and Poland.</p> <p>Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said sabotage could not be ruled out. "We are talking about three leaks with some distance between them, and that's why it is hard to imagine that it is a coincidence," she said.</p>

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said the leaks affected the energy security of the entire continent.

Neither pipeline was pumping gas to Europe at the time the leaks were found amid the dispute over the war in Ukraine, but the incidents will scupper any remaining expectations that Europe could receive gas via Nord Stream 1 before winter.

"The destruction that occurred on the same day simultaneously on three strings of the offshore gas pipelines of the Nord Stream system is unprecedented," said network operator Nord Stream AG.

Although neither was in operation, both pipelines still contained gas under pressure.

Gazprom (GAZP.MM), the Kremlin-controlled company with a monopoly on Russian gas exports by pipeline, declined to comment.

"There are some indications that it is deliberate damage," said a European security source, while adding it was still too early to draw conclusions. "You have to ask: Who would profit?"

A second European source, when asked if there was specific intelligence indicating sabotage, said: "Not specific yet, but it seems this pressure failure can only happen when a pipe is completely cut. Which pretty much says it all."

Russia slashed gas supplies to Europe via Nord Stream 1 before suspending flows altogether in August, blaming Western sanctions for causing technical difficulties. European politicians say that was a pretext to stop supplying gas.

The new Nord Stream 2 pipeline had yet to enter commercial operations. The plan to use it to supply gas was scrapped by Germany days before Russia sent troops into Ukraine in February.

A note by the Eurasia Group said unplanned leaks to undersea pipelines were rare.

"The multiple undersea leaks mean neither pipeline will likely deliver any gas to the EU over the coming winter, irrespective of political developments in the Ukraine war," it said. "Depending on the scale of the damage, the leaks could even mean a permanent closure of both lines."

MALFUNCTION OR SABOTAGE?

European gas prices rose on the news of the leaks, with the benchmark October Dutch price up almost 10% on Tuesday. Prices are still below this year's stratospheric peaks, but remain more than 200% higher than in early September 2021.

"(Of) concern is the security aspect of pipelines across the EU, as this appears to be sabotage.... and will only exacerbate supply concerns for the coming winter," said Refinitiv analyst Timothy Crump.

The leaks happened just before the ceremonial launch on Tuesday of the Baltic Pipe carrying gas from Norway to Poland, a centrepiece of Warsaw's efforts to diversify from Russian supplies.

Norway's Petroleum Safety Authority (PSA) had also urged oil companies on Monday to be vigilant about unidentified drones seen flying near Norwegian offshore oil and gas platforms, warning of possible attacks.

A spokesperson for the Swedish Maritime Administration (SMA) said there were two leaks on Nord Stream 1, one in the Swedish economic zone and another in the Danish zone, adding that both were in an area northeast of the Danish island Bornholm.

"We are keeping extra watch to make sure no ship comes too close to the site," a second SMA spokesperson said.

	<p>Vessels could lose buoyancy if they enter the area, and there might be a risk of leaked gas igniting over the water and in the air, the Danish energy agency said, adding there were no risks associated with the leak outside the exclusion zone.</p> <p>The leak would only affect the environment in the area in which the gas plume in the water column is located, it said, adding that escaping greenhouse gas methane would have a damaging impact on the climate.</p> <p>The Danish authorities asked that the level of preparedness in Denmark's power and gas sector be raised after the leaks, a step that would require heightened safety procedures for power installations and facilities.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/26 CDC: no masks required health care sites
SOURCE	https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/3661963-cdc-no-longer-recommends-universal-masking-in-health-facilities/
GIST	<p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention no longer recommends universal masking in health care settings, unless the facilities are in areas of high COVID-19 transmission.</p> <p>The agency quietly issued the updates as part of an overhaul to its infection control guidance for health workers published late Friday afternoon. It marks a major departure from the agency's previous recommendation for universal masking.</p> <p>"Updates were made to reflect the high levels of vaccine-and infection-induced immunity and the availability of effective treatments and prevention tools," the CDC's new guidance says.</p> <p>Now, the CDC says facilities in regions without high transmission can "choose not to require" all doctors, patients, and visitors to mask. Transmission is different from the community levels CDC uses to guide non-health care settings.</p> <p>Community transmission refers to measures of the presence and spread of SARS-CoV-2, CDC said.</p> <p>"It is the metric currently recommended to guide select practices in healthcare settings to allow for earlier intervention, before there is strain on the healthcare system and to better protect the individuals seeking care in these settings," CDC said.</p> <p>Right now, about 73 percent of the US is experiencing "high" rates of transmission.</p> <p>Community levels "place an emphasis on measures of the impact of COVID-19 in terms of hospitalizations and healthcare system strain, while accounting for transmission in the community," the CDC said.</p> <p>Only 7 percent of counties are considered high risk, while nearly 62 percent of counties are considered low.</p> <p>In addition, the new guidance includes a list of exceptions when people might choose to mask, compared to the previous guidance that included a list of exceptions when masking was not recommended.</p> <p>Even if masking is not universally required, if a provider works in a part of the facility experiencing a COVID-19 outbreak, or if they care for immunocompromised patients, they should wear a mask.</p> <p>When transmission levels are high, masking is recommended for everyone in a health care setting when they are in areas of the health care facility where they could encounter patients.</p>

	<p>Providers can choose not to wear masks when they are in “well-defined areas” that are restricted from patient access, like staff meeting rooms.</p> <p>Public health experts said the updates will make it so fewer people in hospitals and nursing homes wear masks, putting patients and providers at risk.</p> <p>Megan Ranney, dean of the Brown University School of Public Health, tweeted that the new guidance could result in places with substantial transmission unmasking sick patients who haven’t yet been tested for COVID-19, right next to the elderly, chemo patients, people with pulmonary disorders, and vulnerable pregnant women.</p> <p>“This nuanced have your cake and eat it too approach hasn’t worked A SINGLE TIME throughout the pandemic. People hear ‘no more masks!’ ” tweeted Jerome Adams, who served as surgeon general during the Trump administration.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/27 Super-rich in US did not get richer 2022
SOURCE	https://www.forbes.com/sites/chasewithorn/2022/09/27/the-2022-forbes-400-list-of-richest-americans-facts-and-figures/?sh=691a3b5f18e4
GIST	<p>After a roaring 2021, the 400 richest people in the U.S.–along with many Americans–have been hit by rising inflation and falling markets. As a group, this year’s Forbes 400 is \$500 billion poorer than they were a year ago. Their total net worth stands at \$4 trillion, down 11% from last year.</p> <p>The minimum net worth required to make the list also fell, by \$200 million, to \$2.7 billion. It’s the first time since the Great Recession that America’s ultra-wealthy aren’t richer than the year before. <i>Forbes</i> calculated net worths using stock prices from September 2, 2022.</p> <p>No one has been hit harder than American tech tycoons, who have lost a combined \$315 billion, as their stock prices have plummeted and the spigot of venture capital money has slowed. A total of 41 people fell from the ranks this year, including Yahoo’s Jerry Yang, Rivian’s RJ Scaringe and, thanks to the crypto winter, the Winklevoss twins. Meanwhile, Mark Zuckerberg, last year’s No. 3, fell out of the top 10 for the first time since 2014. He’s \$76.8 billion poorer than a year ago, the biggest loss of anyone on the 2022 list.</p> <p>Elon Musk tops The Forbes 400 for the first time. Despite all the turmoil in both his professional and personal lives, Musk is an estimated \$60.5 billion richer this year, thanks to an 11% jump in Tesla stock and fresh new rounds of funding for SpaceX. He unseats Jeff Bezos, now No. 2, who was hit by a 27% drop in Amazon shares. Bill Gates moved up a spot, to No. 3, despite giving \$20 billion to his foundation earlier this year, thanks largely to Zuck’s bad year.</p> <p>The 20 people at the very top of the list–the uppermost 5%–are worth a staggering \$1.6 trillion, accounting for 40% of the entire Forbes 400’s wealth.</p> <p>Amid all the upheaval, 42 people either joined or rejoined the ranks this year. The richest of the 20 newcomers is oil billionaire Autry Stephens, a West Texas wildcatter worth an estimated \$10 billion. He’s one of 19 on the list who made their money in energy–15 of whom are richer than in 2021–a bright spot during the market downturn, given the surging oil prices over the past year. Other notable newcomers include Elon Musk “fanboy” Leo Koguan, grocery wholesaler and AI-robotics billionaire Rick Cohen and Todd Boehly, who led a group that bought the Chelsea soccer club in May for \$3.1 billion and who is one of 50 sports owners on this year’s list. Another 22 people who made a previous Forbes 400 list, then fell off, are back in the elite club again, including racing legend Roger Penske, Uber cofounder Travis Kalanick and Donald Trump.</p>

	<p>The richest people in America range in age from real estate mogul Ted Lerner and early Berkshire Hathaway investor David Gottesman, both 96, to 29-year old Gary Wang, the cofounder of crypto exchange FTX. Wang, who is new to the ranks, is one of ten list members under the age of 40.</p> <p>The Forbes 400 members remain largely self-made, with 275, or 69%, having created their fortune rather than inheriting it. It also remains male dominated, with just 58 women, two more than a year ago. The richest woman: Julia Koch, the widow of Koch Industries' David Koch (d. 2019). The richest self-made woman: Diane Hendricks, who cofounded building materials distributor ABC Supply.</p> <p>The wealthiest people in the U.S. may have big fortunes, but they don't all write big checks. <i>Forbes</i> once again investigated the charitable giving of every member of the list and ranked each person's generosity on a scale of 1 (those who have given less than 1% of their wealth away so far) to 5 (those who have given at least 20%). More than half have given away less than 5% of their fortune; only nine list members scored a 5.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/26 Uganda Ebola infections, deaths grow
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/09/26/africa/ebola-deaths-rise-uganda-intl/index.html
GIST	<p>Ebola infections have risen across districts in Uganda, bringing the cumulative number of confirmed and suspected deaths to 23, health authorities in the east African country said Monday.</p> <p>Uganda declared an Ebola outbreak last Tuesday after a case of the relatively rare Sudan strain was detected in the country's Mubende district.</p> <p>The virus has now spread to neighboring Kyegegwa and Kassanda districts, with the Ugandan Health Ministry reporting that cumulative cases had risen to 36, including confirmed and probable cases. No cases have been detected in the capital city Kampala.</p> <p>The Ugandan Health Ministry considers a "probable case" as any person who died from suspected EVD (ebola) and had an epidemiological link to a confirmed case but was not tested and did not have lab confirmation.</p> <p>The ministry considers "confirmed cases" as those with positive lab results. Of the number of infections identified so far, 18 of the cases have been confirmed to be infected while another 18 were suspected of having the virus.</p> <p>The ministry also stated that five of the deceased patients were confirmed to have died of the virus while 18 were listed as probable deaths. Around 35 patients are currently being admitted, it added.</p> <p>Uganda has experienced four Ebola outbreaks. The deadliest left more than 200 people dead in 2000.</p> <p>According to the World Health Organization, vaccination against the rare Sudan strain hasn't been tested for efficacy. However, the Ervebo (rVSV-ZEBOV) vaccine has been found to be effective in protecting against the Zaire variant of the Ebola virus.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/26 World Bank cuts China growth forecast
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/world-bank-cuts-china-growth-forecast-as-covid-19-real-estate-crunch-take-toll-11664244004?mod=hp_lead_pos3
GIST	<p>SINGAPORE—The World Bank said it expects developing economies in East Asia to grow faster than China this year for the first time since 1990, as the world's second-largest economy struggles with a real-estate crunch and the government's zero-tolerance approach to Covid-19.</p>

The Washington, D.C.-based lender cut its forecast for Chinese growth this year but said it expects growth among 22 neighboring economies to more than double in 2022 compared with the pace they notched last year, as countries benefit from dismantling most Covid-19 restrictions and a revival in tourism.

The bank said the outlook for the region is threatened, however, by the risk that central banks including the U.S. Federal Reserve [raise interest rates](#) more aggressively than investors anticipate [to contain galloping inflation](#). That could hurt global growth and fuel financial stress in heavily indebted emerging markets, it said.

The World Bank said in its latest assessment of the developing economies of East Asia and the Pacific that it expects China to expand 2.8% in 2022. That is down from a 4.3% forecast in June, and makes the World Bank gloomier on China's prospects this year than the International Monetary Fund, which forecasts 3.3% growth, and some private-sector forecasts from banks including Goldman Sachs Group and Standard Chartered.

"China's success in containing Covid-19 infections comes at a significant economic cost," the lender said in a report published Monday. It also highlighted the drag from [a severe real-estate downturn](#), with sales, prices and construction activity all falling as developers wrestle with heavy debts and consumers lose confidence in a market plagued by unfinished projects.

The Asian Development Bank last week cut its forecast for Chinese growth this year, to 3.3% from 5% in April. Financial institutions including Goldman Sachs, Nomura and S&P Global Ratings in recent days have cut their forecasts for growth next year, too, citing a darkening global backdrop and the chance that China sticks with its zero-Covid policy well into next year.

The region encompassed by the report includes China and Southeast Asian economies such as Malaysia and Indonesia, as well as Pacific islands such as Samoa and Tonga. In all, it covers 23 countries, though not advanced Asian economies such as South Korea, Singapore and Japan.

The region excluding China is expected to grow 5.3%, up sharply from the 2.6% recorded in 2021. Vietnam is forecast to expand 7.2%; the Philippines, 6.5%; Malaysia, 6.4%; and Indonesia, 5.1%.

"Within the region we see a reversal of roles," Aaditya Mattoo, World Bank chief economist for East Asia and the Pacific, said in an interview, referring to China lagging behind other economies in a region where it usually drives growth.

Some of those economies are still smaller than they were before the pandemic, underscoring the prospect for continued domestic growth to close the gap even as Western demand for Asian exports fades. Output in Cambodia, the Philippines and Thailand is expected to surpass prepandemic levels this year, the World Bank said.

Most countries have relatively low debts and manageable financing needs, it said. But some could come under pressure as [a strengthening dollar](#) and rising interest rates push up debt-servicing costs, an especially painful mix for those with foreign currency borrowings, such as Laos and Mongolia, the World Bank said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Lumber prices back to pre-Covid levels
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/lumber-prices-fall-back-to-around-their-pre-covid-levels-11664239652?mod=hp_lead_pos5
GIST	<p>Lumber prices have fallen to their lowest level in more than two years, bringing two-by-fours back to what they cost before the pandemic building boom and pointing to a sharp slowdown in construction.</p> <p>Lumber futures ended Monday at \$410.80 per thousand board feet, down about one-third from a year ago and more than 70% from their peak in March, when the Federal Reserve began raising interest rates to fight inflation.</p>

Wood prices crashed in the early days of the 2020 lockdown, but they [exploded that summer](#) when stuck-at-home Americans remodeled en masse and suburban home sales surged. Two-by-four prices nearly tripled the prepandemic record in an early sign of the inflation and broken supply chains that would bedevil the economic reopening.

But [lumber has led the way down](#) for commodities since the central bank took aim at rising consumer prices and [the overheated housing market](#). For two years, climbing lumber costs lifted home prices. Now home builders say that cheaper wood is giving them wiggle room to offer buyer incentives and to trim prices without crimping their profit margins.

Wood-pricing service Random Lengths said its framing-lumber composite index, which tracks cash sales in several species, fell last week to \$529, down more than 60% from early March. Now that supply issues have eased and the [highest mortgage rates in more than a decade](#) have slowed home sales, buyers are no longer hoarding lumber for fear of running out.

“All the urgency over the past two years—‘give me everything you can’—that’s basically over. Lumberyards are not scared of the price going up,” said Michael Goodman, director of specialty products at wholesaler Sherwood Lumber Corp., which his family owns and operates. The Melville, N.Y., distributor sells framing lumber and plywood to building-supply companies, truss manufacturers and shipping-crate makers around the country. “The sexy lumber world is coming to an end, unfortunately,” he said.

The rate at which new U.S. housing is being built is down about 13% from April, when residential construction activity hit its highest level in more than a decade, according to the Census Bureau. An increase in new multifamily buildings has offset a sharper decline in the construction of single-family homes, which typically use about three times as much lumber per unit as apartments.

The issuance of building permits for residential construction has declined steadily since March. The National Association of Home Builders said its measure of builder confidence declined in September for the ninth straight month, to a level of pessimism not registered since 2020’s Covid-19 lockdown and the 2008 housing crash.

Mill executives, analysts and timber consultants who gathered last week at a World Forestry Center conference in Portland, Ore., said the lumber sector is bracing for recession, though not a severe one.

Paul Jannke of Forest Economic Advisors LLC said his firm forecasts that lumber consumption will decline by as much as 2.5% this year and up to 4.5% in 2023 as home construction stalls and remodeling demand reverts to normal following the [pandemic renovation boom](#).

Despite the steep drop in consumption, Mr. Jannke and others expect wood prices to be much higher than during previous downturns—in the \$400s per thousand board feet, rather than the \$200s—due to record-low inventories among dealers and rising mill costs, especially in British Columbia, where [forest fires](#), wood-boring beetles and conservation efforts have reduced the supply of logs.

The lumber price that mills in western Canada need to break even is about \$500 per thousand board feet, which means that they are likely to choke back output whenever cash prices for the spruce, pine and fir boards they saw drop below that, Mr. Jannke said.

Mills there, as well as in the U.S. Pacific Northwest and the South, have already begun cutting back. [Canfor](#) Corp., one of North America’s largest lumber producers, said it began a two-week curtailment Monday at most of its facilities in British Columbia. Work will resume at reduced operating schedules aimed at trimming the Vancouver firm’s production capacity by about 200 million board feet, or about 15% of last year’s fourth-quarter output.

	<p>The consolidation of North America's sawmills by a few big firms, such as Canfor and West Fraser Timber Co., has hastened the speed at which production is choked back in response to falling prices and should buoy prices, said Håkan Ekström of Wood Resources International LLC.</p> <p>“Markets are a little more controlled with fewer mill owners,” he said. “When there were more owners, everyone waited for someone else to slow down.”</p> <p>Dealers like Sherwood's Mr. Goodman say that the quick curtailment triggers are reason to load up on wood. “There's upside risk of waiting and really no downside to buying right now, that's what we're telling our customers,” he said.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/27 Teacher, staff shortages in half of schools
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/teacher-staff-shortages-reported-by-about-half-of-schools-survey-finds-11664232087?mod=hp_lead_pos13
GIST	<p>More than half of principals said their schools were understaffed at the start of the current school year, according to a survey published Tuesday in the Education Department's first national examination of the school staffing problem since the pandemic began.</p> <p>The National Center for Education Statistics survey of 904 principals conducted in August found that 53% of principals felt their schools were short workers, with 60% saying they were unable to fill nonteaching positions and 48% unable to fill teaching positions.</p> <p>The vacancies were particularly acute in certain staffing areas, with 65% of schools that reported shortages lacking special-education teachers and 59% short of transportation staff, principals said.</p> <p>The staffing problem in schools isn't new, but reports of shortages more than doubled during the pandemic, said Chris Chapman, associate commissioner for NCES, which is part of the Education Department. About 20% of principals said their schools were understaffed before Covid-19, according to Mr. Chapman.</p> <p>Part of the challenge on the teaching front is that many teachers have left the profession during the pandemic, amid school closures and academic and behavioral problems among students. Some districts have begun to look in new places for staff and others have offered new perks to would-be hires.</p> <p>Also, fewer candidates are entering the teaching field, said Dr. Quintin Shepherd, superintendent of Victoria Public Schools in Victoria, Texas.</p> <p>Dr. Shepherd said his district of 21 schools is currently trying to fill dozens of open positions, including 29 teaching slots and 69 transportation and custodial jobs. He said that offering higher salaries to attract staff isn't an option for his district because of budget constraints.</p> <p>Instead, schools in Victoria are staffing classes that lack permanent teachers by hiring substitutes, asking teachers to work in other classes during free periods and by combining classes, Dr. Shepherd said.</p> <p>The district has also established a relationship with a college in Mexico to bring in teachers on two-year visas, encouraged classroom aides to become teachers and created a program to encourage high-school students to enter the profession, he said.</p> <p>“If there's an idea that's out there, we're trying it,” said Dr. Shepherd. “Frankly, these vacancies are a real problem.”</p> <p>Districts around the country have gone to creative new lengths to attract and retain staff, superintendents said. Some have transitioned to four-day school weeks as a perk for teachers, while others have offered signing bonuses and eased requirements for teaching certificates.</p>

	<p>In some cases, shortfalls have forced districts to cancel classes and schools to cut programs. Other states have reported some progress in filling openings.</p> <p>A statewide shortage of about 5,000 bus drivers compelled schools in Pittsburgh to delay the first day of school in 2021, said Eric Hagarty, Pennsylvania's acting state education commissioner.</p> <p>The state reacted by inviting residents who held commercial driver's licenses to apply for part-time jobs piloting school buses, Mr. Hagarty said. Since then, the state has halved its driver shortage. This year, schools in Pittsburgh began on time, he said.</p> <p>"We're not out of the woods yet, but we made a significant dent in the problem," said Mr. Hagarty.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 Myanmar confronts a mounting, hidden toll
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/09/27/myanmar-conflict-coup-takeover-junta-pdfs-military/
GIST	<p>NEAR THE THAI-MYANMAR BORDER — When Kyaw Shwe, 48, packed up his family to leave Myanmar, he knew there wasn't much he could bring. The military was looking for him and the journey to the border was going to be long. In a backpack, he stuffed a few sets of clothes, his phone and his reading glasses. Then, carefully, he folded in a Burmese cheroot cigar and five packets of instant coffee.</p> <p>One recent afternoon, in an empty house along Thailand's western border where he's been sheltering, Kyaw Shwe retrieved the coffee packets. He wanted to explain that his 18-year-old son had given him the coffee and the cigar the day before he disappeared. He wanted to say his name, Bhone Wai Yan Kyaw, and talk about what soldiers did to him when they found him in a safe house with other student activists.</p> <p>Kyaw Shwe lifted the coffee in his hands but couldn't bring himself to speak. His shoulders sagged. He let out a wail.</p> <p>As fighting rages on in Myanmar, its citizens are faltering under the losses they've incurred in 18 months of violent conflict. Entire villages have been razed; loved ones have been executed in secret; and 1.1 million jobs have evaporated from the economy. International attention has waned, drawn away by crises such as the war in Ukraine. But the costs of the military's takeover — and the ongoing desperate push to resist it — have continued to mount.</p> <p>Cynthia Maung runs a community clinic on the Thai-Myanmar border and has seen, over the past year, a trickle of war casualties become a flood. The military has killed more than 2,000 civilians, including some in apparent war atrocities, according to the U.N. special rapporteur on Myanmar. Nearly a million people, a quarter of them children, have been displaced, forced to live in temporary shelters where malaria, dengue and dysentery are rife.</p> <p>At some point, humanitarian groups may be able to tally the number of people lost to violence, famine or disease during this period, Maung said. But every day, she also sees signs of an invisible toll that will be impossible to calculate. Grief and despair are everywhere.</p> <p>"We cannot even begin to understand," Maung said, "how huge it'll be."</p> <p>Not far from where Kyaw Shwe is sheltering, a young engineer who joined a rebel army is learning how to walk after his right leg was shattered by a land mine. A single mother begs for news back home of her 14-year-old son, who hasn't spoken to her since the military put out a notice for her arrest, while a pair of newlyweds search for work after the garment factory they relied on in Yangon shut down. An esteemed professor who once held court in one of Myanmar's best universities paces around an old, barren terrace house, terrified to slide open the gate because his family of six, including his two children, crossed into Thailand without documentation.</p>

In nondescript buildings along the border, there are tens of thousands more like them. They traveled through jungles and combat zones to make it here. For many, it's the first place they were able to pause — and take stock.

"I still don't know how to believe it," said Zin Moe, Kyaw Shwe's wife. She held the T-shirt her son wore the last time he visited, unwashed after six months because she hoped it would keep his smell.

"We've lost everything."

The steepest costs

Myanmar's young people, who grew up during the country's brief window of democracy, have led the resistance against the military junta, also known as the Tatmadaw. As the conflict drags on, many are paying a steep price while contending with a loss of faith in their future — and a sense of being abandoned by the world.

Violence has escalated in Myanmar's northwest, particularly in the Sagaing and Magway regions, which are almost entirely isolated from international assistance. [Experts warn](#) that tensions are also on the verge of exploding in places like Rakhine state, site of the military's systematic persecution of the Rohingya Muslim minority — now considered by the United States [to be genocide](#). The United Nations said it needs \$826 million to address basic humanitarian needs in Myanmar for 2022. As of July, the world body had raised \$106 million — 13 percent of that goal.

Powerful countries have done little to stem this downward spiral, resistance leaders say.

[Japan](#), [Australia](#) and [Singapore](#), all of which moved swiftly to punish Russia after its invasion of Ukraine, have made no move to do the same with the Tatmadaw. The United States adopted some sanctions but has stopped short of fulfilling key requests from activists, such as penalizing the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise, a state-owned energy company that serves as a lifeline for the junta. The European Union [imposed sanctions on the firm](#) in February.

"There are villages in Magway and Sagaing literally on fire," said a 31-year-old rebel who asked to be identified only by his battlefield name, Comrade Kite. "And who is helping us?"

Like many who have joined Myanmar's rebellion, Comrade Kite was not a fighter — he had never even held a gun — until the coup in early 2021. A computer network engineer, he enlisted with a rebel army after watching the junta's soldiers open fire at peaceful protesters.

In April, he was on a reconnaissance mission in the southern jungles when he heard a high-pitched whistle. There was a buzzing in his ears, he recalled, before he fell to the ground. When he woke up in a hospital on the Thai side of the border, the bottom of his right leg was gone.

Land mines have long been a weapon of the Tatmadaw, and since the coup, soldiers have been laying mines in conflict zones at a "massive scale," possibly constituting war crimes, rights advocates say.

In the Thai hospital, Comrade Kite was surrounded by young men just like him, he said. Some had lost limbs; others were blinded or left paralyzed. In the daytime, he kept himself distracted with his laptop, watching YouTube tutorials and Marvel movies. But at night, no matter how he tried, he couldn't block out the sound of crying.

"It's not easy for us, mentally," he said. "We're young. Most of us aren't married; we don't even have girlfriends."

"We worry about how we're going to fit back into society. We worry about whether we'll ever be able to be happy."

The narrowing of hope

It's hard to know how many Myanmar families have been separated since the coup. In addition to people who have been killed, thousands are in prison and even more in hiding. Under pressure from the military, some families have started cutting ties with relatives associated with the resistance, posting public notices disowning sons, daughters and siblings.

Ma Cho, 48, lived with her teenage son in the southeastern state of Karen before the coup. They were close, she said, and ate nearly every meal together until soldiers came looking for her a year and a half ago.

Ma Cho was a volunteer for a women's committee within the National League for Democracy, the political party led by Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. After the coup, Ma Cho said, she found her face broadcast on state-run TV stations — a single mother and motorcycle saleswoman transformed into a “political criminal” wanted by the junta. She's tried contacting her son numerous times after fleeing Karen, she said, but he's been too afraid to respond.

“This, really, is a very painful feeling for me,” Ma Cho said, choking back tears. “I think I'll meet him only after the revolution.”

Many others along the border sustain themselves on similar hopes — at least, for as long as they're able.

Bhone Wai Yan Kyaw, the oldest of Kyaw Shwe's three children, had been an ordinary teenager before the military takeover. He was interested in soccer, poetry and music, and hated bullies. He had just started learning how to play the guitar, and on Instagram, he posted covers of folk songs that he and Kyaw Shwe recorded together. It made his father happier than he ever knew.

After the coup, Kyaw Shwe, a Yangon taxi driver, took Bhone Wai Yan Kyaw to his first demonstration and saw him blossom. The teen was thoughtful and charismatic, and when he rose to speak at the back of pickup trucks, people stopped to listen.

On Feb. 25, Kyaw Shwe said, Bhone Wai Yan Kyaw disappeared. Kyaw Shwe and Zin Moe went to the safe house in Yangon he'd been sharing with other student activists, and neighbors told them that a convoy of five military trucks had come by. Bhone Wai Yan Kyaw was in the house with two others and was helping one of them, a 15-year-old girl, escape over a wall when soldiers shot him twice. Once in the chest and once, after he had fallen onto the ground, in the head. Soldiers dragged his body onto the street, neighbors said, then loaded him onto a truck and drove off.

Kyaw Shwe showed a photo he had taken of a dirt-streaked wall with a hole where sunlight was streaming through. It had been left by one of the bullets that killed his son.

“Merciless,” he said.

Kyaw Shwe spoke slowly, leaning against his knee as he sat on the floor. It was painful to talk about his son, but his death was the reason Kyaw Shwe had made his family leave Myanmar. It wasn't possible to mourn publicly in the country anymore. And he had wanted Bhone Wai Yan Kyaw's life to amount to more than that bullet hole.

“I will let myself be hurt,” Kyaw Shwe said, “because the world needs to know.”

Early this year, he recalled, on one of the few quiet weekends the family had together, Bhone Wai Yan Kyaw announced that he planned to have a birthday party when he turned 19 on Sept. 6.

Zin Moe told him that he was already an adult and that adults didn't need birthday parties. But he shook his head.

“No,” he said, smiling at his parents. “I'm not an adult.”

	"I'm still just a kid."
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/26 Worker protests at airports across country
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/09/26/airline-workers-airport-strike-protest/
GIST	<p>Cashiers, baristas, bartenders, cooks and lounge attendants at San Francisco International Airport launched an open-ended strike Monday over staffing levels and wages, shutting down most of one of the nation's busiest airport's food concessions.</p> <p>Flight attendants at United and Southwest airlines on Tuesday are expected to demonstrate at 21 airports around the United States, including Guam, as well as in London, to draw attention to workplace problems made worse by understaffing.</p> <p>Across the country, flight attendants and airport workers are responding to a hailstorm of workplace issues related to pay and staffing levels. Airline travel during the pandemic recovery has been marred by hundreds of thousands of canceled and delayed flights, attacks on flight attendants and widespread desperation among airport workers and travelers.</p> <p>While neither the strike by airport concession workers nor the protests by flight attendants are expected to disrupt air travel this week, they're the latest signs of upheaval in the nation's transportation sector, coming just weeks after rail workers narrowly averted a strike fueled in large part by nationwide labor shortages.</p> <p>In the airline industry, the airlines and air traffic controllers keep pointing at each other, to fend off blame for disruptions as demand for air travel has rebounded. Airlines in particular are struggling to attract workers in a red-hot labor market where less-grueling jobs are easier to come by, and federal data shows that airlines are responsible for the high rate of cancellations. The air transportation industry is still down 54,000 workers compared to February 2020.</p> <p>Lucinda To is among the 1,000 workers on strike at San Francisco International, where she has worked for 20 years. She prepares buffets, washes dishes and clears tables at restaurants and the United Club lounge for weary travelers. It is draining work that has only gotten harder this year, she said. With inflation at 40-year-highs, To said she has to work 60 hours a week at two food service jobs at the airport for \$16.99 an hour to afford a two-bedroom unit in the Bay Area. Her mortgage is \$2,800 a month.</p> <p>"Right now, on my wage, I make so little that I couldn't even buy one meal at this airport, where hamburgers are \$22," To said. "I need to work two jobs to support my family, and I'm always working double shifts."</p> <p>To, 61, regularly spends the night in her car at the airport, to save on gasoline and pass the time between shifts that stretch late into the night and start early the next day.</p> <p>The strike at San Francisco International is expected to shut down "virtually every food and beverage outlet within the airport," Unite Here Local 2 union leaders said, and the union is urging travelers to bring their own food. The food service workers are employed by more than 30 companies at 84 food and beverage outlets.</p> <p>"The San Francisco International Airport advises travelers that a labor action by airport food workers is impacting staffing [at] restaurants and lounges," said Doug Yankel, a spokesperson for the airport. "Some food and beverage outlets are closed, while others remain open with limited hours and offerings."</p> <p>Additional protests among food service workers are being planned, union officials said.</p>

Flight attendants for United and Southwest will demonstrate on Tuesday amid drawn-out contract negotiations over wages, staffing levels and rescheduling of workers when flights are delayed or canceled. The protests will happen outside airports in Chicago, Denver, San Francisco, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Washington and other cities.

At United, flight attendants said their lives have been upended by cancellations and delays, which routinely force them to spend hours, unpaid, waiting on the phone with the airline's scheduling services. Some attendants slept on cots in airports this summer because hotels were overbooked.

The workers said the delays are caused by understaffing within the scheduling division.

Scott Pejas, a United flight attendant in Chicago and president of his local chapter of the Association of Flight Attendants, said disruptions to schedules have become the norm for flight attendants.

"We are mentally and physically exhausted, because instead of getting rest, we're on hold, on the phone, trying to find out where we're going to spend the night or layover," Pejas said. "Flight attendants will land somewhere at 10 p.m. and have to wait until 1 a.m. on the phone to find out where they're going to sleep. We're not getting rest."

Joshua Freed, a spokesperson for United, said the company is eager to reach a contract agreement with the union to address flight attendants' concerns.

"We've worked hard to reduce wait times for flight attendants to talk to a crew scheduler, including more hiring and adding digital options for some items," he added.

Lynn Montgomery, the president of TWU Local 556, which represents 18,000 Southwest flight attendants nationwide, said flight disruptions have become so routine that "workers are constantly working outside their normal schedule."

"I've never seen flight attendants so disheartened," said Montgomery, who has also worked as a Southwest flight attendant for 30 years. "They feel like they've given and given, and the company isn't giving back to them. It's way more investor-focused these days than employee-friendly."

A spokesperson for Southwest said the airline encouraged employees to express their opinions.

"Informational picketing is common during contract negotiations, and we do not anticipate any disruption in service resulting from the demonstration planned by off-duty flight attendants," the spokesperson said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/26 Russian conscripts face hard times
SOURCE	https://www.usnews.com/news/world-report/articles/2022-09-26/putins-conscripts-will-suffer-intelligence-assessment
GIST	<p>The conscripts that President Vladimir Putin is rushing to the front lines in Ukraine will likely suffer from unsustainably high death rates and ultimately won't affect Russia's chances for success, according to new Western assessments of his contentious decision to press 300,000 reservists into service.</p> <p>The damning analyses of Russia's mass mobilization effort – which has led to mass protests as well, many of which have turned violent – center on several logistical and bureaucratic failures from the Russian Ministry of Defense down to the local governments. The fundamental flaws reflect a total lack of planning from the Kremlin for the war it launched seven months ago and originally expected would end in victory in days.</p> <p>Britain's military intelligence revealed Monday morning that Russia has undermined its own style of training new recruits by having to deploy and send to war the units within its broader brigades that would usually prepare incoming trainees for battle. Western militaries, by contrast, have dedicated</p>

training centers outside the deployable combat units that are solely responsible for military-wide training.

And though the Kremlin has said its current mobilization will center on those with combat or trauma experience, many likely have not had military experience for several years.

The lack of military trainers, and the haste with which Russia has started the mobilization, “suggests that many of the drafted troops will deploy to the front line with minimal relevant preparation,” U.K. military intelligence concludes in a new assessment it released Monday morning. “They are likely to suffer a high attrition rate.”

“The process will be ugly, the quality of the reservists poor, and their motivation to fight likely even worse,” independent think tank the Institute for the Study of War wrote in its latest regular assessment of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

It adds that the self-made problems undermining Putin’s latest effort “are so deep and fundamental that he cannot likely fix them in the coming months—and possibly for years. Putin is likely coming up against the hard limits of Russia’s ability to fight a large-scale war.”

The Kremlin itself has acknowledged some of the issues identified by these latest assessments, including the institute’s observation that the local governments responsible for actually rounding up military-aged males and sending them to training units are not complying with pledges from the Russian Ministry of Defense that some eligible citizens would be exempted, such as students, for example – either the result of an inability for the two bureaucracies to communicate effectively or an unwillingness by the ministry to keep its promises facing a massive troop shortage.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters Monday morning, “We hope that the pace of elimination [of exempted recruits] will increase, that all errors will be corrected.” He did not provide details on how that hope would materialize into changes in the conscription process.

Peskov first acknowledged on Friday what he called “[hysterical, extremely emotional](#)” outrage at the mobilization effort that forced widespread protests and a veritable exodus of young Russian men to airports and border crossings in an attempt to escape their new responsibilities to the state.

The institute observes that the tenor of the protests reflect “Putin’s repeated and surprising failures to prepare his population for a major war.”

He has attempted to tap into the shared national identity built on Russia’s history of defending against foreign invaders that presented an existential threat, like the Nazis in World War II.

“The current conflict is as far from that reality as any war could be, and no rhetorical sleight of hand can replace the brutal realities of the Nazi armored advances as a spur to fight,” it states.

Ultimately, the mobilization “will not affect the course of the conflict in 2022 and may not have a very dramatic impact on Russia’s ability to sustain its current level of effort into 2023,” the institute concludes.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Federal data: too few teacher applicants
SOURCE	https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2022-09-27/new-federal-data-too-few-applicants-in-k-12-schools
GIST	Personnel shortages that challenged K-12 leaders at the outset of the new academic year and continue to disrupt the U.S. public school system are driven by a shortage in the pipeline of new educators and school staff, federal data confirms.

More than half of all public schools in the country reported that they were understaffed at the start of the 2022-23 school year, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, the research arm of the Education Department, and 69% reported that too few teacher candidates applying for open positions was the primary challenge.

Additionally, 63% of public schools also reported too few candidates applying for non-teaching staff vacancies.

“The majority of public schools are starting the new school year feeling understaffed, particularly in areas like special education, transportation, and mental health,” National Center for Education Statistics Commissioner Peggy Carr said in a statement. “And while many schools say that the COVID-19 pandemic has made it more challenging to fill positions, 20 percent of schools say that they were already understaffed before the pandemic began.”

“These data points are critical,” she said, “for understanding challenges our public schools are facing, allowing policymakers to provide timely assistance to help our students and educators in areas where it is needed.”

As of August, special education and math teaching positions were among the most difficult teaching positions to fill, with 78% and 75% of schools reporting that it was either “very” or “somewhat difficult,” respectively, to hire fully certified teachers in those areas.

The most difficult non-teaching staff positions to fill were transportation staff and custodial staff, with 94% and 84% of schools reporting it was either “very” or “somewhat difficult” to hire staff in these areas, respectively.

The newest tranche of data from the National Center for Education Statistics seeks to better understand the impact of the pandemic on the public education system. It comes just weeks after the White House announced its most serious effort yet to help districts fill teacher and school staff vacancies and alter the educator pipeline to make it easier and more attractive to enter the profession.

Education Department and Labor Department officials are urging state and local education and workforce leaders to address teacher and school staff shortages by increasing wages and expanding teacher preparation programs, including with registered teacher apprenticeships. The two national teachers unions, state school chiefs, governors and teacher colleges are working to expand high-quality registered teacher apprenticeship programs, teaching residencies and so-called “grow your own” programs that help communities establish a pipeline of teachers who grew up in their community. And the private sector, including major human resources and recruiting platforms, are partnering with school districts to advertise K-12 openings.

The effort spans some of the most senior administration officials and Cabinet members, as well as national education and business leaders and human resource experts from across the country. It represents the beginning of a major public-private partnership and underscores the gravity of the situation facing the country’s public school system.

To be sure, the teacher and staff shortages are not universal. Rural schools and schools in neighborhoods that are historically hard to serve – those with high percentages of low-income students, students with disabilities and English-learners – as well as certain positions, such as STEM, foreign languages and special education, are facing the biggest challenges.

Many schools have unfilled positions because they’re adding staff, not because teachers are leaving in droves – though that narrative is bolstered by a significant increase in teacher burnout and low morale, as well as legitimate concerns about the educator pipeline as schools of education report decreased enrollments and fewer students identify teaching as a career of interest.

	<p>But those open positions are crucial to the ability of schools to function as safe and healthy learning environments amid a pandemic that's wrought steep academic setbacks and significant mental health challenges.</p> <p>On his back-to-school bus tour earlier this month, Education Secretary Miguel Cardona called the teacher shortage a "crisis of respect" and said no one should be surprised to see the pipeline of educators drying up given how little teachers are compensated for the work they do, adding that their average weekly wages have increased just \$29 after adjusting for inflation since 1996.</p> <p>"If we're serious about addressing the teacher shortage issues, we must first address the teacher respect issue," he said. "That means first and foremost paying our teachers a livable wage."</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/26 Monkeypox recedes, uncertainty lingers
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/26/health/monkeypox-vaccine.html
GIST	<p>Nearly four months after the first report of monkeypox in the United States, the virus is showing promising signs of retreat, easing fears that it may spill over into populations of older adults, pregnant women and young children.</p> <p>Supplies of the vaccine have improved, and federal health officials have begun clinical trials to gain a better understanding of who benefits, and how much, from both the vaccine and the drug used to treat those who become infected.</p> <p>That's the good news. But unhappily, case numbers are accelerating in a few states and jurisdictions, including Indiana, Virginia and Massachusetts. Black and Hispanic men make up nearly two-thirds of the infected, but only about one-fourth of those vaccinated so far.</p> <p>"Our progress is incredibly uneven," said David Harvey, the executive director of the National Coalition of STD Directors.</p> <p>"This outbreak is far from finished," he added.</p> <p>Recent reports suggest that a single dose of the vaccine, Jynneos, may not be protective enough, raising fresh concerns about the Biden administration's plan to distribute fractional doses.</p> <p>And federal health officials have warned that the virus could become resistant to tecovirimat, the only safe treatment for those who are infected.</p> <p>"When you only have one drug in your armamentarium, that can be somewhat precarious," said Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, the Biden administration's top medical adviser. "But you've got to go with what you have at the same time as you try and develop additional drugs."</p> <p>As of Friday, there were nearly 25,000 cases of monkeypox in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. The United States accounts for nearly 40 percent of the global tally.</p> <p>But new cases have been decreasing steadily for weeks, to a daily average of 208 on Sept. 22 from more than 500 in early August.</p> <p>The Los Angeles Department of Public Health recently confirmed the nation's first death from monkeypox, in a severely immunocompromised individual. Health officials in Texas are investigating another death that may be related to the infection.</p> <p>Two cases of encephalomyelitis — inflammation in the brain and spinal cord — have been reported, both in previously healthy gay men in their 30s.</p>

Overall, however, federal health officials are optimistic that the epidemic is waning. While testing and vaccines will continue to be important, officials envision a future in which monkeypox is not gone, but manageable with contact tracing, vaccination and early treatment.

“I think it’s going to look a little bit more like more episodic cases, smaller clusters,” said Dr. Demetre Daskalakis, the deputy coordinator of the White House’s monkeypox response.

The recent decline is most likely the result of a combination of vaccinations, immunity gained from infection in the population most at risk, and a change in behavior in this group, Dr. Daskalakis said.

In a survey conducted by the C.D.C. in August, roughly half of men who have sex with men said they had reduced the number of their partners and one-time sexual encounters.

But falling case numbers may soon lead these men to believe that the threat has passed. “We can’t ask people to change their behavior forever,” Dr. Daskalakis said. “That didn’t really work with H.I.V., so it’s not going to work here, either.”

Vaccination is likely to be a more effective containment strategy in the long term, he added.

As of Sept. 20, health officials had administered nearly 700,000 doses of Jynneos in the 48 jurisdictions for which data were available. While that is a substantial improvement over the early weeks of the outbreak, it accounts for only 22 percent of the doses needed to protect the 1.6 million Americans estimated to be at high risk.

Even as infections decline, the proportion of cases among Black and Hispanic men has grown to 70 percent in mid-September from 37 percent in late May. Yet Black men have received less than 9 percent of the doses administered so far, and Hispanic men about 16 percent.

Federal health officials are intensifying efforts to reach high-risk groups and have vaccinated at least 11,000 attendees at large gatherings where Black and Hispanic men congregate, such as Atlanta Black Pride.

The C.D.C. has announced a new program that would make up to 10,000 vials of vaccine — or 50,000 doses, under the new dose-sparing strategy — available to communities where hesitancy, language barriers, immigration status or other obstacles prevent widespread vaccination.

Eligibility for the vaccine is scattershot by location, and the criteria often opaque, according to an analysis by the Kaiser Family Foundation. Some states, like Indiana and New Mexico, offer no information online about who qualifies. Laboratory and health care workers who may be exposed to the virus are eligible in only 18 states and cities.

Many men at high risk have opted for a single dose, which may not be sufficiently protective. Although the proportion of second doses has increased, so far 77 percent of administered doses are first doses.

A new study suggests that will not be enough to prevent infection or severe symptoms. Dutch researchers found that one full dose of Jynneos [produces low levels](#) of antibodies to monkeypox.

Two full doses are better but still “modest,” said Dr. Marion Koopmans, the head of virology at Erasmus Medical Center in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, who led the study.

“It does raise the question how good protection will be,” she said. “Since we don’t know a whole lot about this, I do think we really need to figure out what’s going on.”

In a bid to stretch the vaccine supply, the Biden administration has embraced a dose-splitting strategy, in which one-fifth of a regular dose is delivered into the skin — a so-called intradermal method — rather than the fat underneath. This approach has been tried in other instances of vaccine shortage.

But activists and some scientists have decried the administration's reliance on fractional dosing, noting that federal officials moved slowly to make available millions of Jynneos doses held by the manufacturer in Denmark.

"What's so bizarre about this whole thing is we should have never gotten into the situation," said James Krellenstein, a founder of PrEP4All, a group that promotes access to H.I.V. care.

There is minimal research to support fractional doses instead of the full regular doses, Mr. Krellenstein noted: "They may be equivalent, but there's a real good chance that they're not."

The Dutch team did not look at how well a one-fifth dose of Jynneos protects against monkeypox. But in an earlier study, they tested a bird flu vaccine similar to Jynneos and found that two fractional doses produced much lower levels of antibodies than two full doses.

Still, it's possible that a combination of one full dose and one fractional dose may work well, Dr. Koopmans said.

Little is known about the effectiveness of regular doses, let alone fractional doses, because Jynneos was approved mainly on the basis of animal data. But the evidence so far suggests that two doses are better than one, said Dr. Peter Marks, the Food and Drug Administration's top vaccine regulator.

"Having two doses of Jynneos was the correct way to go here, and the fact that the intradermal route allowed us to have a sufficient number of doses to move forward in that direction, I think, was a smart idea," he said.

"We're working in a public health emergency," he added. "I think we're doing our best with the data that we have in hand, and the data that we trust, and the data as it emerges."

There is some evidence that a third shot given a year after the first two doses provokes a vigorous immune response. If that turns out to be true, a three-dose regimen may be ideal to manage monkeypox infections in the long term. Dr. Marks said federal scientists are still debating whether to test third doses.

A new trial led by the National Institutes of Health, which began earlier this month, will enroll 200 adults and compare the standard dose with intradermal delivery of one-fifth and one-tenth doses.

If the fractional doses prove to be comparably effective, the dose-splitting approach would greatly expand world supply, including in countries where the vaccine is currently unavailable.

Researchers will collect information on antibody levels in the immunized participants. But they will not be tracking other immune cells that may be equally important for protection from the virus, according to Dr. John Beigel, the N.I.H. researcher leading the trial.

"This was a decision for expediency," he said.

A separate N.I.H. trial aims will test how well tecovirimat, also called Tpoxx, works in 500 adults and children infected with monkeypox.

Tecovirimat is the only drug used to treat monkeypox in the United States, as the alternatives can have toxic side effects. The drug was approved in 2018 on the basis of animal studies, and has never been tested rigorously in people.

Small clinical studies, as well as recent anecdotal observations of patients, suggest that the drug works well. A small percentage of patients experience minor side effects, such as headache and nausea.

	<p>Given the early data, the Biden administration has been sharply criticized for making it too difficult for clinicians to prescribe the drug. And the C.D.C. has urged clinicians to reserve tecovirimat for patients who are severely immunocompromised, pregnant or breastfeeding, or who have lesions in certain sensitive areas, as well as for children under 8.</p> <p>The decision to limit access is rooted in the fear that indiscriminate use could lead to Tpoxx-resistant monkeypox, federal officials said. Several studies suggest that even small genetic changes could leave the virus resistant, according to the F.D.A.</p> <p>The new trial should offer a clearer picture of the risk. “We want to make it much easier, and with much more confidence, to make Tpoxx available for people who are infected,” Dr. Fauci said.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 Border surge sends smuggling prices up
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/sep/27/20-billion-payday-joe-bidens-border-surge-sends-sm/
GIST	<p>The migrant smuggling economy at the U.S.-Mexico border now tops \$20 billion and the cartels have made at least \$2.6 billion in profit over the past 12 months just from controlling the routes illegal immigrants use, according to a Washington Times analysis.</p> <p>Both amounts are up substantially from the Trump and Obama years because more people are coming to the border and because they are paying higher prices.</p> <p>Mexican migrants are paying an average of \$8,600 in total smuggling fees this year, according to The Washington Times’ database of smuggling cases. That’s up roughly \$2,000 from 2019, the last pre-pandemic year under the Trump administration. Migrants from El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala are paying about \$11,500 for the trip, up from \$9,000 in 2020 and \$7,900 in 2019, The Times’ data shows.</p> <p>Those rates are averages across the southern border. Migrants pay a little less in parts of Texas and a little more in California.</p> <p>“There’s an inflationary pressure on the number,” said Ronald Vitiello, a former chief of the Border Patrol. “Everything else being equal, things are more expensive. Employees, gasoline, logistics — things are more expensive.”</p> <p>The migrant surge that began at the start of the Biden administration is still going strong 20 months later. The numbers paint a grim picture of how the surge has fattened the wallets of the cartels that control the smuggling economy.</p> <p>One yardstick is the mafia fee, or “piso” — literally, the tax — migrants pay to cartels to use their routes into the U.S. Nearly every migrant pays, and the rate has increased to \$1,300 per person. That is up more than 50%, from about \$850 in the Trump years.</p> <p>The Border Patrol nabbed nearly 2.2 million people trying to sneak into the country from Mexico over the past 12 months. Subtracting repeat crossers who may have paid only once for multiple attempts, adding in estimated “gotaways” who avoid capture, and figuring conservatively that 90% of migrants pay the piso means the cartels have made \$2.6 billion over the past year on crossing fees alone.</p> <p>That’s free and clear profit just for use of their smuggling routes. Any money they make from the rest of the smuggling journey, such as operating stash houses or coordinating foot guides and drivers, comes on top of that.</p> <p>“They’re printing money,” Mr. Vitiello said.</p> <p>All the extra money is bad news for the U.S., said former Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf.</p>

He told The Times' "Politically Unstable" podcast that the cash helps fuel cartels' other deadly activities, such as producing and smuggling in fentanyl, the synthetic opioid that is responsible for record drug overdose deaths in the U.S.

"It's all the same enterprise," Mr. Wolf said. "So the money that they make on the human trafficking, the \$10,000 to \$12,000 per head, they're using to either import from China or make fentanyl and push that across the border."

Mr. Vitiello said the cartels are cashing in under President Biden.

"Reasonable people can understand this has a shelf life," he said. "They're taking advantage of the maximum flow because they know it's not going to last."

The \$20 billion for the total smuggling economy includes the money migrants pay to the recruiters in their home countries, those who shepherd them to the U.S. border, foot or raft guides who get them across the boundary, stash house operators who shelter them on the U.S. side and drivers who take them deeper into the U.S.

The gross domestic product of Honduras or El Salvador is less than \$30 billion.

Border monopoly

A simple supply-and-demand curve might suggest prices should be falling. The pool of migrants is larger, meaning a bigger supply for the smugglers to share.

That doesn't account for the cartels' monopolies. The cartels control ground and all the activities that go through there, including drug and migrant smuggling, and they set the prices they want.

Victor Manjarrez, a longtime Border Patrol agent who now teaches at the University of Texas at El Paso, said there is a logic to how prices are established, though the smugglers don't exactly advertise their thinking.

In general, those from Mexico pay the least and those from the Northern Triangle countries of Central America pay a couple of thousand dollars more per person.

The going rate for a Mexican to cross in Laredo, Texas, is \$7,400, up from about \$6,400 in 2020 and \$5,900 a year before. Someone from Honduras or Guatemala crossing through Laredo is paying about \$10,000, up from \$7,700 in 2019.

Those from South America might pay closer to \$20,000, and those from outside the hemisphere can pay even more.

Other factors contribute to the exact price.

Those willing to walk more often pay less. Making a five-day trek through the deserts of Arizona or the Otay Mountain Wilderness in Southern California saves thousands of dollars compared with getting bused to the border, hopping across, and quickly getting picked up and driven north.

Even more expensive is being crammed into a trunk or a modified gas tank and brought through a border crossing or stuck on the back of personal watercraft and ridden up the California coast. Mexican migrants can pay more than \$15,000 for those trips. Chinese migrants have told officers that they paid more than \$50,000 for their journey.

"It's based on level of comfort, mode of transportation, how quick you want to do it," Mr. Manjarrez said.

He said wealthier migrants from more urban areas are willing to pay for a few hours of serious discomfort in a car trunk over the days-long, life-threatening slog through the desert.

Smugglers also have adapted to the new conditions on the border. Because of the Biden administration's leniency, many illegal immigrants from beyond Mexico are hoping to get caught. They believe, usually correctly, that they will be quickly released.

Mr. Manjarrez said smugglers coach migrants on how to take advantage of the Biden policies, such as by lodging claims for political asylum, as part of their package.

What particularly troubles him are the implications that a migrant from a country where the average annual income is \$5,000 manages to pay \$10,000 for the trip.

"Most of these folks who are crossing usually come from the poorest of the poor in their country. So these fees get paid, but then you get the exploitation," Mr. Manjarrez said.

The lucky migrants end up owing relatives already in the U.S. The unlucky ones have to work off their debts to the smuggling cartels in any way they can.

The Biden administration recognized the dangers of the smuggling networks and announced a major initiative to try to detect and arrest the smuggling leaders.

In a major raid this month, authorities said, they unraveled an organization working in the Laredo area to bring migrants across the border to Texas and up to San Antonio, where they could fan out to destinations throughout the country.

The organization charged about \$8,000 per person. Migrants were smuggled in suitcases stuffed inside pickup trucks, stacked inside empty water tanker trucks or sealed into wooden crates strapped to flatbed trailers, according to court documents.

Prosecutors said the organization raked in "at least millions of dollars in proceeds," and they specifically traced \$2.3 million that they were seeking to forfeit as proceeds from the smuggling venture.

Border security experts commended those efforts but said it's not a substitute for policies that discourage the flow of people.

'The borders are open'

The Times' database uses affidavits filed by Border Patrol agents, Customs and Border Patrol officers and Homeland Security Investigations agents in border smuggling cases in which there are witnesses — namely migrants who were being smuggled. The authorities often elicit the smuggling fees the migrants pay and include that information in the affidavit.

The Times' calculations are based on those numbers.

Juan Jose Reyes-Mazariegos, who was arrested by the Border Patrol on Interstate 10 in Arizona on Sept. 13, told agents he paid roughly \$13,000 for his trip. That's 50,000 Guatemalan quetzals — about \$6,400 — to go from Guatemala to the U.S. border, \$6,000 for crossing and smuggling fees, and \$700 to get him from Phoenix to New York.

Jesus Ivan Garcia-Torres, a Mexican pulled from the water off the coast of California after he was dumped from a personal watercraft he rode across the international boundary, said he paid 120,000 pesos, or roughly \$6,000, for his trip. It was the second time he was caught that week.

Last week, agents nabbed Deylin Denisel Salazar-Enriquez, a Guatemalan woman, as she was being driven through a checkpoint outside Laredo. She told agents that a family member was paying \$23,000 to have her smuggled to North Carolina.

That price is exceptionally high. The court documents didn't shed light on the reasons.

The Times calculated the cartels' mafia fee income by taking the total number of people arrested by the Border Patrol over the previous 12 months and adjusting for recidivists and gotaways who were never captured.

The Times calculated that 90% of migrants pay a mafia fee — some experts say the rate is closer to 100%, while others say it's lower, in part because the cartel in the Del Rio area doesn't charge a piso.

Together, that amounts to a little more than 2 million payments over 12 months. At \$1,300 per payment, that works out to \$2.6 billion.

Getting a handle on the exact size of the smuggling picture is tricky, but The Times used rough approximations from its data. Of the illegal immigrants caught by Border Patrol agents this year, about 34% are Mexican, 24% are from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, and the rest are from elsewhere.

Using the average payment rates for Mexicans, that works out to roughly \$6 billion. The Central Americans account for \$5.6 billion.

The Times' database doesn't have enough data points from other nationalities to make firm calculations, and the Department of Homeland Security doesn't release granular data on the full scope of illegal crossings of those nationalities.

Assuming they pay the same rate per person as the Central Americans — likely a low estimate — that works out to another \$9.5 billion.

That adds up to roughly \$20 billion in total smuggling fees.

Urbino "Benny" Martinez, the sheriff of Brooks County, Texas, said those numbers challenge Vice President Kamala Harris' recent assertion that the border is secure.

"The borders are open, and the volume is high. The cartels are just taking advantage of it," he said.

Enriching the cartels is more than a matter of money.

Experts say the cartels control every facet of the border environment, turning the U.S. into a reactionary force.

Cartels determine who crosses where, and they use the people as distractions. The migrants occupy Border Patrol agents' attention in one spot while more valuable cargo — drugs or higher-value people — go through the border elsewhere.

That makes the cartels' growing financial power more troubling, Mr. Vitiello said.

"It gives them the ability to further destabilize Mexico," Mr. Vitiello said. "It also speaks to their business model. There's lots of talk about demand in the U.S. and legalization and decriminalization. Let's just say we changed national policy about crossing borders. You think they wouldn't do something else just as lucrative?"

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/26 CG: China, Russia naval ships off Alaska
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/sep/26/coast-guard-spots-chinese-russian-naval-ships-off/

GIST	<p>ANCHORAGE, Alaska — A U.S. Coast Guard ship on routine patrol in the Bering Sea came across a guided missile cruiser from China, officials said Monday.</p> <p>But it turned out the cruiser wasn't alone as it sailed about 86 miles (138 kilometers) north of Alaska's Kiska Island, on Sept. 19.</p> <p>The patrol boat, known as a cutter called Kimball, later discovered there were two other Chinese naval ships and four Russian naval vessels, including a destroyer, all in single formation.</p> <p>The Honolulu-based Kimball, a 418-foot (127-meter) vessel, observed as the ships broke formation and dispersed. A C-130 Hercules provided air support for the Kimball from the Coast Guard station in Kodiak.</p> <p>"While the formation has operated in accordance with international rules and norms, we will meet presence with presence to ensure there are no disruptions to U.S. interests in the maritime environment around Alaska," Rear Adm. Nathan Moore, Seventeenth Coast Guard District commander said.</p> <p>The Coast Guard said Operation Frontier Sentinel guidelines call for meeting "presence with presence" when strategic competitors operate in and around U.S. waters.</p> <p>The Kimball will continue to monitor the area.</p> <p>The Coast Guard did not immediately respond to questions about the incident from The Associated Press.</p> <p>The Chinese and Russian formation came a month after NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg warned about China's interest in the Arctic and Russia's military buildup there.</p> <p>Stoltenberg said Russia has set up a new Arctic Command and has opened hundreds of new and former Soviet-era Arctic military sites, including deep-water ports and airfields.</p> <p>China has declared itself a "near Arctic" state and plans to build the world's largest icebreaker, he said.</p> <p>"Beijing and Moscow have also pledged to intensify practical cooperation in the Arctic. This forms part of a deepening strategic partnership that challenges our values and interests," Stoltenberg said in a visit to Canada's north.</p> <p>This wasn't the first time Chinese naval ships have sailed near Alaska waters. In September 2021, Coast Guard cutters in the Bering Sea and North Pacific Ocean encountered Chinese ships, some about 50 miles (80 kilometers) off the Aleutian Islands.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 Russian men fleeing conscription
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/27/we-want-to-run-russian-men-fleeing-conscription
GIST	<p>Since Vladimir Putin announced Russia's first mobilisation since the second world war last Wednesday, <i>povestka</i>, or draft papers, have been delivered to people across the country.</p> <p>As husbands, brothers and sons bade emotional farewells to families before they left to fight in Ukraine, others were scrambling to find a way to leave Russia, spurred by reports that some conscripts were being sent directly to the frontlines without training.</p> <p>Options for routes out of Russia are dwindling, with plane tickets sold out and some neighbouring countries preparing to close their borders to Russian tourists and asylum seekers.</p> <p>Here, three Russians share how the Kremlin's partial mobilisation has affected them, and what they are planning next.</p> <p>'I made it to Kazakhstan on a train full of men'</p>

Kirill, an English teacher from the south of Russia, was “shocked and dumbfounded” when news of the mobilisation broke.

By Wednesday evening, the 28-year-old had come to the conclusion that he had to flee. “By then, plane tickets had surged in price and were completely unattainable. However, there was a train to Kazakhstan from my city. I got on that train on Friday, with a lot of other people like me. I’d say 80% of the people onboard were Russian guys aged 20-45.

“I am now in a short-term rental apartment in Atyrau, until Friday, so I can figure out my next move. I’m doing the paperwork for a 90-day permit to stay, and for getting a local bank account. The local housing market is already very squeezed, and there are more people coming every day.”

Going back to Russia before the war is over, Kirill says, is probably not an option, while reactions of Kazakh locals to trains full of new arrivals like him have been mixed.

“While there are some people who are annoyed by our presence, the response has been mostly one of understanding and sympathy. My landlord showed such kindness that it almost made me cry, and won’t charge me the extortionate price others are asking for because he doesn’t want to profit off my situation.

“My mum was so relieved when I got to Kazakhstan. She has been following independent news, and understands what it means to be sent to the frontline.”

‘We are trying to run, but don’t know if we can’

Vladimir, 20, and two friends of the same age, had dreamed of moving to the Czech Republic to study for natural science degrees in 2024. But last week, the future the three young men had been working towards collapsed.

“We are very scared. We want to run,” he says. “We are so young, we have so many plans, but the state thinks otherwise. We were promised that there would be no mobilisation. We feel betrayed. The Kremlin lies, all the time. They look at us like toys.”

Vladimir says he and his friends are determined to escape, and have begun studying English and pooling their money.

Plane tickets out, he says, are extortionate, but they hope to find a country in Asia they can afford to travel to.

“The world is changing very quickly. Sanctions have made it difficult to get into eastern [Europe](#), the energy crisis has made living in Europe too expensive. We are considering Georgia, Malaysia, Thailand. Each of us has about 300,000 rubles [£4,800]. Can we make it out with that?

“We cannot write in English, but we use a translation app, watch YouTube videos in English now, and read a British article about the Russian economy the other day. We don’t care what happens next. Our decision is final.”

‘I can’t get out, and might become cannon fodder’

Konstantin, 25, from Moscow, says he cannot leave. He and his wife had been planning to leave the country when the war began, but, he says, “It’s too late now.”

“The plan was for me to get into data science, get a remote job and go to Turkey or Georgia. But I might get conscripted any moment, the borders may close soon, and we don’t have enough money to buy tickets, let alone rent an apartment and live abroad. My wife also has a daughter from a previous marriage, and we can’t take her with us without her father’s legal permission.”

Konstantin has, as things stand now, only one option, he says.

	<p>“I’m going to avoid getting conscripted at all costs. If I have to break my arm, I’ll do it, if I have to break a policeman’s jaw and go to jail, so be it. But I will not become an invader, I will not kill innocent people because a murderous lunatic wants me to.</p> <p>“My wife is very scared and anxious; she cries pretty much every day. I tell her everything is going to be OK.”</p> <p>Konstantin says his parents worry too, but can’t help him financially with his escape as their business was destroyed by sanctions after the annexation of Crimea.</p> <p>Even if he could find the money to get out on his own, he has doubts whether he would be able to do so for much longer. “A young healthy man leaving the country now? That’s a red flag. News comes every few hours that people may be forbidden to leave Russia by border security, or may be denied entry to countries such as Georgia, for example.</p> <p>“I feel as if I’m being boiled, slowly. I come from a poor family from the North Caucasus. Through hard work, I made my way to Moscow, and finished medical school. And now, I’m supposed to leave my beautiful family – not to defend my home, but to become cannon fodder?</p> <p>“I am full of rage.”</p> <p>*All names have been changed</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 Russians pay private planes evade draft
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/27/russians-paying-25000-for-seats-on-private-planes-after-war-mobilisation
GIST	<p>Demand for seats on private jets has boomed in Moscow after Vladimir Putin ordered the first mobilisation since the second world war and wealthy Russians look for a way out of the country amid reports that authorities plan to close the borders to men of mobilisation age.</p> <p>Passengers are said to be predominantly heading to Armenia, Turkey and Azerbaijan, which allow Russians visa-free entry. They are paying between £20,000 and £25,000 for a seat on a private plane, while the price to rent an eight-seater jet ranges from £80,000 to £140,000, which is many times more expensive than the normal fare.</p> <p>“The situation is absolutely crazy at the moment,” said Yevgeny Bikov the director of a broker jet company, Your Charter. “We would get 50 requests a day; now it is around 5,000.”</p> <p>The Kremlin’s decision to announce a partial mobilisation has led to a rush among men of military age to leave the country, sparking a new, possibly unprecedented brain drain. Miles-long traffic jams have formed at Russia’s border crossings, while most one-way commercial plane tickets have sold out for the coming days.</p> <p>Bikov said his firm had started to charter larger commercial planes in an effort to meet the demand and bring down prices. “But we simply cannot find enough spots for everyone,” he said, adding that the cheapest seat on a chartered commercial plane to Yerevan was priced at about 200,000 rubles (£3,000).</p> <p>FlightWay, which offers private jet flights, said it was experiencing an increase in requests for one-way flights to Armenia, Turkey, Kazakhstan and Dubai. “The demand has increased by 50 times,” said Eduard Simonov, the company head.</p> <p>He said the availability of jets for rent was severely limited after the EU and UK introduced sanctions on Russia shortly after the start of the conflict that prohibited the leasing or insuring of aircraft for use in Russia.</p>

“All the European private jet firms have left the market. There is more demand than supply now and the prices are through the roof compared with six months ago,” Simonov said.

It is not only the very rich looking to make use of private jets, with some companies chartering planes to fly out their male staff. According to the Russian business outlet Kommersant, one video game design company in Moscow chartered an entire flight to get employees out of the country.

“We are getting a completely new client base, companies as well as people who never flew private before,” Simonov said. “There are many who had some extra money left and are looking to get away.”

There are widespread fears in Russia that the Kremlin plans to close its borders this week.

Independent human rights groups have said that since Sunday border guards at Russia’s only operational crossing point with Georgia have been stopping some people from exiting, citing the law on mobilisation.

Asked about the possibility of border closures in a call with reporters on Monday, the Kremlin’s spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, said: “I don’t know anything about this. At the moment, no decisions have been taken on this.”

Russia was already set to lose 15% of its millionaires this year, according to one study, as its wealthiest citizens move abroad. The mobilisation is likely to deepen this outflow, potentially exacerbating the damage to Russia’s economy.

“Most of our male younger clients left when Putin announced the mobilisation last week,” said one staffer at a luxury concierge service company in Moscow. “I used to be calling up restaurants and bars on the Patriarch Ponds to book tables for them,” he said, referring to an upmarket neighbourhood in central Moscow. “Now, all I do is scroll through flight aggregators to get the last plane seat for them to Yerevan.”

The exodus of Russia’s rich and powerful could fuel some of the anger observed in the poorer areas of the country that appear to be disproportionately affected by the conscription.

A recent prank call involving Peskov’s son highlighted the belief held by many that senior Russian officials and their children will not be drafted to fight in Ukraine.

In the call, orchestrated by two activists linked to the jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny, Nikolai Peskov is heard saying he will “obviously not” enlist in the army when asked to report to the military commissariat at 10am the next day.

“You must understand it is not right for me to be there. I have to resolve this on a different level,” Nikolai Peskov is heard saying.

When asked about the phone call, his father said he was “aware of it” and claimed that the full transcript had not been published.

The Guardian has seen evidence that the son of one prominent Duma member, an official who frequently makes anti-western and patriotic statements, left the country on a flight to Istanbul on Saturday. According to text messages reviewed by the Guardian, the Duma deputy escorted his son to an airport in Moscow to ensure he would be let out of the country.

“The great escape,” said one Snapchat story sent to a private group by the son on the plane to Turkey.

[Return to Top](#)

SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/sep/26/leading-economies-sliding-into-recession-as-ukraine-war-cuts-growth-finds-oecd
GIST	<p>The world's leading economies are sliding into recession as the global energy and inflation crises sparked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine cut growth by more than previously forecast, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).</p> <p>A dependency on expensive gas for heavy industry and home heating will plunge Germany, Italy and the UK into a long period of recession after global growth was projected by the OECD to slow to 2.2% in 2023 from a forecast in June of 2.8%.</p> <p>With the global economy needing to grow by about 4% to keep pace with rising populations, the OECD said incomes per head would be lower in many countries.</p> <p>OECD's interim chief economist, Álvaro Pereira, said the world was paying a steep price for the Ukraine war and Russia's decision to restrict access to gas supplies more tightly than was forecast in June.</p> <p>He said governments would need to encourage households and businesses to reduce their consumption of gas and oil to help weather a difficult winter.</p> <p>Pereira also supported the determination of central banks to reduce inflation by raising interest rates. "We need to reduce demand, there is no doubt about that. And monetary and fiscal authorities need to work hand in hand to achieve it," he said.</p> <p>China's growth rate is expected to drop this year to 3.2% – its lowest since the 1970s – causing a large decrease in trade with neighbours South Korea, Vietnam and Japan, dragging down their capacity to grow.</p> <p>A recovery in China next year to 4.7% will be weaker than expected, the OECD said, as Beijing wrestles with a property market and banking sector weighed down by huge debts.</p> <p>However, the Paris-based policy forum was most alarmed by the outlook across Europe, which is most directly exposed to the fallout from Russia's war in Ukraine.</p> <p>The OECD forecast that UK GDP growth would be flat in 2023. However, this projection does not take into account the measures announced in the chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng's mini-budget on Friday.</p> <p>The OECD forecast a drop in growth in the eurozone from 3.1% this year to only 0.3% in 2023, meaning that many countries in the 19-member currency bloc will spend at least part of the year in recession. A recession is defined as two straight quarters of contraction.</p> <p>France could escape a recession if it grows by 0.8% next year as predicted by the OECD, but will suffer along with other European countries after the downgrade in GDP growth since June of 1.3 percentage points.</p> <p>Russia will shrink by at least 5.5% this year and 4.5% in 2023. Berlin's dependence on Russian gas before the invasion means the German economy will shrink by 0.7% next year, down from a June estimate of 1.7% growth.</p> <p>The OECD warned that further disruptions to energy supplies would hit growth and boost inflation, especially in Europe, where they could knock activity back another 1.25 percentage points and increase inflation by 1.5 percentage points, pushing many countries into recession for the full year of 2023.</p> <p>Global output next year is projected to be \$2.8tn (£2.6tn) lower than the OECD forecast before Russia attacked Ukraine – a loss of global income equivalent to the UK economy.</p>

	<p>“The global economy has lost momentum in the wake of Russia’s unprovoked, unjustifiable and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine. GDP growth has stalled in many economies and economic indicators point to an extended slowdown,” the organisation’s secretary-general, Mathias Cormann, said.</p> <p>A review of the outlook for the US found that while it is likely to grow slowly this year and be in recession for part of 2023, it was less dependent than other countries on energy from Russia or other sources, allowing for a strong recovery in 2024.</p> <p>The OECD forecast that the world’s biggest economy would slow from 1.5% growth this year to only 0.5% next year, down from June forecasts for 2.5% in 2022 and 1.2% in 2023.</p> <p>World Bank officials have called on central banks to refrain from competitive rate hikes that will push the global economy into recession and harm the economies of developing countries the most.</p> <p>Nevertheless, the OECD said further rate hikes were needed to fight inflation, forecasting that most major central banks’ policy rates would reach at least 4% next year.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/27 Day 216 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/27/russia-ukraine-war-latest-what-we-know-on-day-216-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russia’s “referendums” in Ukraine, which could lead to Moscow annexing 15% of the country’s territory, were due to end on Tuesday. Voting in the eastern provinces of Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia began on Friday and have been dismissed as a sham by western nations, which have pledged not to recognise the results. • The Kremlin said it had made no decision on closing Russia’s borders as the first mobilisation since the second world war prompted some to flee. • The Nord Stream 2 pipeline’s pressure collapsed mysteriously on Monday. Authorities in Germany are trying to establish what caused the sudden drop in pressure in the defunct pipeline, with a spokesperson for its operator saying it could have been a leak. • A Russian man has shot the leader of the local military draft committee in a Siberian town after telling him he would refuse to fight in Ukraine. Video showed the gunman, dressed in camouflage, firing at the official from point-blank range as other potential draftees for the Russian invasion fled the room. • Long queues of vehicles formed at the border crossing between Russia and Mongolia as people continue to flee the Kremlin’s mobilisation order. The head of a checkpoint in the town of Altanbulag said more than 3,000 Russians had entered Mongolia via the crossing since Wednesday. • Nato air forces are conducting drills over the Baltic Sea. Member states including the UK, Germany and Italy have taken part in the military training, both over water and on land, in an effort to boost eastern defences. • The Netherlands has increased its military support for Ukraine. The prime minister, Mark Rutte, also announced new sanctions in response to Russia’s mobilisation and referendums. • The US pledged to provide Ukraine with \$457.5m in civilian security aid. The support was aimed at “saving lives” and “bolstering” Ukrainian law enforcement, said the secretary of state, Antony Blinken. • The Russian Orthodox Church head says Russian soldiers who die on the battlefield will have their sins absolved. Patriarch Kirill, a close ally of President Vladimir Putin and a staunch supporter of the Ukraine invasion, said the “sacrifice washes away all sins”. • The UK announced 92 new sanctions in response to Russia’s “sham referendums” in Ukraine. The package of penalties target those behind the sham votes as well as oligarchs and board members. • Germany is debating whether it should grant asylum to Russian war refuseniks. The interior minister, Nancy Faeser, said the country was potentially prepared to give protection to

	<p>deserters who face repercussions if they refused to fight, but each case would be decided on an individual basis amid security concerns.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The UN's atomic energy watchdog says it is ready for talks about setting up a protection zone around the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant. The International Atomic Energy Agency head met the foreign ministers of Russia and Ukraine at the UN general assembly last week to discuss the possibility. • The US has warned of horrific consequences if Russia follows through with its thinly veiled threats to use nuclear weapons. Antony Blinken said any use of the weapons would have a "catastrophic" impact across the world. • Negotiators of a spending bill in the US Congress have agreed to include nearly \$12bn in new military and economic aid to Ukraine, Reuters reported sources as saying on Monday. The funding – requested by the Biden administration – would include \$4.5bn for defence capabilities and equipment for Ukraine and \$4.5bn in direct support to the Kyiv government, the sources said. • Ukraine claims some Russian conscripts from the Kremlin's mass mobilisation are being sent directly to the frontlines without training. Those included newly drafted personnel in Crimea as well as conscripts in the Luhansk region who have received draft summonses in recent days. • Volodymyr Zelenskiy has vowed to liberate the entire country as Russia presses on with its supposed referendum in occupied areas of Ukraine. The Ukrainian president said the country's armed forces would throw out Russia's forces and retaliate against "every strike of the aggressor".
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 Russia draft: Ukrainians vs Ukrainians?
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/27/conscription-fears-young-ukrainian-men-stopped-leaving-occupied-areas-russian-soldiers-crossing-point
GIST	<p>Young Ukrainian men attempting to leave occupied areas are being turned back by Russian soldiers, as fears grow that they may be conscripted into Russia's army, it has emerged.</p> <p>At the only crossing point between the occupied areas and the rest of Ukraine, Russian soldiers have told dozens of men aged 18 to 35 there is a ban on letting them leave, according to older men who have successfully crossed, as well as two NGOs involved in helping people evacuate and local Telegram groups.</p> <p>The Ukrainian authorities believe Russia will try to mobilise young men in the recently occupied areas to fight against Ukraine – as has been the case in parts of eastern Ukraine under Russian control since 2014.</p> <p>Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, has told Ukrainians in the occupied territories to hide from mobilisation by "any means", adding that if they are forcibly conscripted they should sabotage Russia's military operations from within and "at the first opportunity, switch to [Ukrainian] positions".</p> <p>Oleksandr, a 37-year-old resident of Kherson, said he managed to leave the city last week but witnessed two cars of people being turned back because they had men who fitted the 18-35 age category. One was a 35-year-old man who was with his wife and two children, he said.</p> <p>"Out of the young people I know [in Kherson], they have all been sat at home over the last week with the doors locked," said Oleksandr. "They are trying not to go out anywhere. The fear is very real."</p> <p>The occupying authorities have not yet announced mobilisation in Zaporizhzhia and Kherson and other areas occupied since the invasion. But the general staff of Ukraine's armed forces claimed on Saturday that men in the occupied territories who had accepted Russian passports were receiving conscription notices.</p>

In a move widely seen as an escalation, Russia announced the mobilisation of 300,000 men last week, after Russian soldiers were forced to retreat from the Kharkiv region. The decision has led to protests across Russia. Russian conscripts who refuse to fight will face prison sentences.

The occupying authorities in Ukraine are carrying out staged so-called referendums on joining Russia – after which, leading Russian figures say, Moscow will consider any attack by Ukraine in those areas a direct attack on Russia. According to Russian state media, Moscow plans to announce the annexation of the occupied territories on 30 September.

NGOs involved in evacuating people from the occupied territories said young men had been turning to them after being stopped at the crossing point at Vasylivka, a town in Zaporizhzhia region. The checkpoint is the only place where civilians can cross the 800-mile-long contact line to leave the Russian-occupied areas.

The number of applications from young men looking to leave has increased by 50% over the last week, according to Dina Urich, the evacuation coordinator of the NGO Helping to Leave. But unfortunately, said Urich, it is not possible to help men who come under the 18-35 age bracket because of the alleged ban.

In one Telegram chat, where people trying to cross the checkpoint share information, a woman said her group had included men aged 18 to 35 but they managed to pass through. “There was some sort of [order] about letting out men, but the women pleaded and cried and made a fuss,” she wrote. Another woman who was travelling with a 21-year-old man in her group said he was let out because he had a health exemption.

However, reports in other Telegram chats were negative, with one man writing: “I’ve called three [drivers] and they all said that they are not letting 18-35-year-olds out.” “It’s a lie that they are letting anyone out ... we tried yesterday,” wrote another woman.

The results of a survey on who managed to get through the checkpoint will be posted on Monday evening, according to the Telegram group’s administrator. One man, posting under the nickname Konstantin, pleaded with his 8,000 fellow members of the group to remain calm until the facts were known.

“I myself am sitting on [my] suitcases, wanting to [ask] every hour what’s happening [at the checkpoint] and whether they are letting people through or we should wait,” he wrote.

Ukrainian officials have described the potential mobilisation of men in Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions as an act of genocide.

Helping to Leave and Kherson Evacuations, another NGO helping people to get out, also said buses, including those not carrying any men, had been turned back at Russian checkpoints since Thursday. But those with their own cars were able to cross into Ukraine.

“For the buses, they are asking for this special Russian licence and turning them back but no one knows how to get said licence,” said the head of Kherson Evacuations, who asked not to be named because his team and relatives live in occupied Kherson.

“We already see that in the occupied Luhansk and Donetsk areas, almost all the male population has been mobilised, we expect them to announce mobilisation in [Kherson and Zaporizhzhia] regions once they ‘annex’ them,” said Vadym Skibitsky, the deputy head of Ukraine’s military intelligence, in an interview.

“So, thousands more Ukrainians will die, Ukrainian citizens. It’s a straightforward genocide – these people have no training and no equipment; they are just sent to die.”

Rights organisations for Crimean Tatars say members of the minority ethnic Muslim group have received the overwhelming majority of conscription notices in Russian-annexed Crimea.

	<p>Zelenskiy, commenting on the conscription of Crimean Tatars as well as that of minority ethnic Russians in occupied parts of Ukraine, described the move as “criminal” and “another element of Russia’s policy of genocide”.</p> <p>Videos have appeared of protests against mobilisation in Dagestan and in Yakutia, republics in southern Russia and Siberia. A group of women protesting in Dagestan told a police officer: “We are not blind ... it was Russia who attacked Ukraine.”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/26 Vax no longer required to enter Canada
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/covid-19-vaccine-no-longer-required-to-enter-canada-starting-oct-1-united-states-blaine-trudeau-washington-travel-restrictions-blue-jays-mlb
GIST	<p>People visiting Canada will no longer have to show proof of vaccination to enter the country, government officials confirmed Monday.</p> <p>Canada, like the United States, requires foreign nationals to be vaccinated when entering the country. No change in the mandate is expected in the U.S. in the near term.</p> <p>Unvaccinated foreign travelers who are allowed to enter Canada are currently subject to mandatory arrival tests and a 14-day quarantine.</p> <p>Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government has agreed to let a cabinet order enforcing mandatory COVID-19 vaccination requirements at the border expire on Sept. 30.</p> <p>The government is also ending random COVID-19 testing at airports. Filling out information in what became an unpopular ArriveCan app will also no longer be required. Some blamed it for delays at airports.</p> <p>The government will also no longer be required passengers to have pre-board tests for cruise ships.</p> <p>"The removal of border measures has been facilitated by a number of factors, including modelling that indicates that Canada has largely passed the peak of the Omicron BA.4- and BA.5-fuelled wave, Canada's high vaccination rates, lower hospitalization and death rates, as well as the availability and use of vaccine boosters (including new bivalent formulation), rapid tests, and treatments for COVID-19," the government said in a release.</p> <p>The Canadian government announced also announced that it will no longer require people to wear masks on planes to guard against COVID-19.</p> <p>Transport Canada said the existing rules for masks will come off on Oct. 1</p> <p>"We are able to do this because tens of millions of Canadians rolled up their sleeves and got vaccinated," Transport Minister Omar Alghabra said.</p> <p>Health Minister Jean-Yves Duclos said the negative attitudes of some passengers have made it hard for airlines and crews to enforce the mask mandate in recent months and cited that as a factor in the decision.</p> <p>Removal of the vaccine mandate for non-citizens entering Canada means unvaccinated professional athletes like Major League Baseball players would be allowed to play in Toronto in the playoffs should the Blue Jays make the postseason.</p> <p>It would also apply to the National Basketball Association and the National Hockey League. Unvaccinated players are currently not allowed to cross the border into Canada.</p>

	The Public Health Agency of Canada still strongly recommends that people wear masks, particularly in crowded environments such as planes and trains.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/26 Bolt Creek fire closes portions US 2
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/portion-of-us-2-closed-for-fire-activity-skykomish-snohomish-bolt-creek-fire
GIST	<p>A portion of US 2 between NE Old Cascade Highway (milepost 46) and Skykomish (milepost 49) will be closed in both directions overnight Monday as the Bolt Creek Fire approaches the highway, Washington State Patrol said.</p> <p>WSP and the Washington Department of Transportation will reassess the situation Tuesday morning before the highway can be reopened.</p> <p>The portion of US 2 reopened Saturday after a weekslong closure. A section of the highway between Index and Skykomish had been closed since Sept. 10 while firefighters battled the Bolt Creek Fire. State arborists then had to clear the roadway of hazardous trees and rocks.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/26 NOAA: Atlantic storms grow stronger faster
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/noaa-scientists-say-atlantic-storms-are-growing-in-strength-hurricane-ian-ian-grows-to-hurricane-status-rapid-strengthening-expected-monday-maximum-winds-cuba-florida-gulf-coast-cold-front-severe-weather-flash-flooding-rain-damage-tampa-bay-st-petersburg
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (TND) — With Hurricane Ian approaching Florida, scientists with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration say Atlantic storms are increasingly getting stronger and faster.</p> <p>NOAA experts say warmer ocean water plays a role but hurricane data is tricky, making it hard to prove the exact causes of the changes being seen but it is clear that the patterns are changing.</p> <p>“Greater numbers of major hurricanes, greater intensities, more rapid intensification all these changes since 1980,” said Tom Knutson, a senior climate scientist with NOAA.</p> <p>Many point fingers at greenhouse gas and climate change but Knutson says it’s not that simple.</p> <p>“The question is: which of these changes are actually being driven by an increase in greenhouse gasses and to what degree are these changes being driven by something else?” he said.</p> <p>Knutson says it’s too early to tell based on current data, adding that it's "premature to conclude with high confidence that human-caused increasing greenhouse gasses have had a detectable impact on past Atlantic basin hurricane activity,” he said.</p> <p>Other experts agree, saying it’s difficult to determine what is contributing to the strength of these storms.</p> <p>“The difficulty with looking at trends in hurricane data is that we go past you know the late 1970s, it gets a little bit difficult in terms of observations,” said Kristen Corbosiero, an associate professor with the University of Albany.</p> <p>Knutson and Corbosiero say higher seas are causing storm surge to worsen.</p> <p>“We do have a sea level rise so whatever hurricanes are coming in, are coming in on higher,” Knutson said.</p> <p>Some storms also show an increase in rainfall.</p>

	<p>“It’s really really hard to pin climate change on any one storm, you can’t say any one storm was caused by climate change or impacted by it. But we can say things we know, the climate is getting warmer, storms are moving slower, more rainfall, higher storm surge,” said Corbosiero.</p> <p>Hurricanes are increasingly costly, according to NOAA — mostly thanks to humans and the desire to flock to the coastline, building up infrastructure, homes, roads and buildings which are now at risk of damage whenever the next storm rolls through.</p> <p>Tampa Bay is currently in the path of Hurricane Ian. The area has not had a direct hit since 1921 and there has been a lot of construction in the last 100 years, causing some to worry about the amount of damage Ian may do.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/26 Ex-Seattle firefighters sue city, chief
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/23-former-seattle-firefighters-sue-city-chief-over-vaccine-mandate
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - The city of Seattle and Chief Harold Scoggins are facing a lawsuit from a group of 23 former Seattle firefighters for religious discrimination and wage theft. The suit is tied to the firefighters’ decision to not get vaccinated.</p> <p>Every plaintiff filed for a religious exemption. None of them were given accommodations, and the suit alleges that no attempt was ever made.</p> <p>Josh Gibbs, one of the 23 firefighters suing the city, said he was discriminatorily fired.</p> <p>"It very much seems like it was purposeful like there was intent or malice," said Gibbs.</p> <p>Gibbs spent more than a decade with Seattle Fire Department. Thinking back, he remembers as a child dressing up as a fireman on an elementary trip – it was a dream that stretched back to childhood. His path, however, took a long road: including stops in the military and construction before ultimately becoming a firefighter.</p> <p>Now, he’s uncertain whether he can ever don the uniform again. He told FOX 13 that some of the men and women that are suing would jump back in a heartbeat, while others would rather stay away forever. Gibbs said he’ll find the answer if the opportunity arises. For now, he’s back in construction and trying to figure out what the next step is.</p> <p>"This is still very visceral," he said. "The scars haven’t healed."</p> <p>The suit seeks lost wages, pension contributions and damages. An exact dollar amount isn’t given.</p> <p>As the attorney writes, the 23 firefighters were given a choice that was against their religious beliefs: "disregard their sincerely held religious beliefs or lose their chosen professions and livelihoods."</p> <p>The Seattle City Attorney’s Office tells FOX 13 that they’ve seen the lawsuit, and are currently reviewing it.</p> <p>"We have reviewed the litigation and are preparing a response to the lawsuit on behalf of the City and Chief Scoggins," a statement read. "We would be happy to share a copy of our response once we file it." This isn’t the first legal action to be filed in regard to vaccine mandates.</p> <p>In August 2021, Gov. Jay Inslee issued a proclamation that all state employees, as well as K-12 and public university staff, had to be fully vaccinated by mid-October or get an exemption, or they would face termination.</p>

	<p>That caused a flurry of legal maneuvers. As the October deadline approached, federal judges denied three attempts to get court orders to "stay" the decision in a matter of two weeks. All of those challenges claimed constitutional rights were violated, and that exemption requests were not properly handled.</p> <p>On Sept. 8, Inslee announced the remaining COVID state of emergency proclamations would end on Oct. 31, which includes the vaccine mandate proclamation.</p> <p>It's unclear how far this latest lawsuit will end differently, but for firefighters like Gibbs, there is still hope that leadership in Seattle can make new decisions. Since the firefighters have left, he noted there's a new Mayor and a new City Attorney.</p> <p>"They still to this day have the opportunity to do the right thing," said Gibbs. "What do you want? It's the same thing for the Chief, the same thing for the mayor and the city attorney. What do you want your legacy to be?"</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/26 Spokane weather balloons aid Ian forecast
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/weather/everything-is-connected-how-spokane-weather-balloons-help-hurricane-ian-forecast
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. - As Hurricane Ian churns away near the Gulf of Mexico with its eyes on Florida, National Weather Service meteorologists in Spokane have begun stepping up their efforts to help track the powerful storm by launching extra weather balloons.</p> <p>Yes, even though Spokane is over 3,000 miles away from Florida with a 0% chance of hurricane impacts, FOX Weather reports.</p> <p>"Everything is connected," said meteorologists with the National Weather Service in Spokane. "Stuff that happens across the Pacific Northwest has implications and impacts of what happens downstream i.e. how things evolve across the southeast US."</p> <p>And they're not alone. National Weather Service offices across the Midwest and East Coast -- and a handful in the Pacific Northwest -- are helping the Hurricane Ian tracking efforts by launching weather balloons every six hours instead of the usual 12-hour intervals for the next several days.</p> <p>The balloons measure temperature, dew point, relative humidity, atmospheric pressure and wind direction and speed and reach as high as 20 miles above the ground until it pops.</p> <p>By launching more balloons, meteorologists and the computers that generate our forecast models can get updated real-time weather data from the upper atmosphere that are crucial to the accuracy of model projections.</p> <p>"Extra balloon flights are helpful, (because) the data gets ingested into every model run to help forecast Ian's track & help the models become consistent with better data," NWS Spokane said.</p> <p>The additional launches began Friday afternoon at the Florida stations and expanded across much of the nation on Saturday.</p> <p>"This is the closest we have ever been to hurricane forecasting!" tweeted NWS Spokane meteorologists. "We are excited!"</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/27 Avert government shutdown this Saturday?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/27/us/politics/congress-vote-government-shutdown.html

WASHINGTON — Top lawmakers proposed [a stopgap funding package](#) on Monday night that would avert a government shutdown at the end of the week and set aside a major new round of emergency aid to Ukraine to defend itself against Russia.

With funding set to run out when a new fiscal year begins on Saturday, lawmakers are aiming to quickly move the legislation through both chambers in the coming days to keep the government funded through Dec. 16. But even as the final details of the package came together, it faced an increasing likelihood that it could not pass in its current form.

Most of the measures in the package, which would punt difficult negotiations over the dozen annual spending bills to after the November midterm elections, appeared to generate little opposition. It would provide just over \$12 billion in military and economic aid to Ukraine, and ensure the federal government could quickly spend money on natural disaster recovery efforts, according to a summary from the [Senate Appropriations Committee](#). It also notably sidestepped the Biden administration's request [for emergency funds to combat the coronavirus pandemic](#) and monkeypox, given Republican opposition.

But the regular autumn scramble to avoid a shutdown has been complicated by the inclusion of a plan that would make it easier to build energy infrastructure across the country. The legislation is the [product of a Democratic deal](#) that helped secure the vote of Senator Joe Manchin III of West Virginia, a centrist Democrat, for the tax, health and climate law known as the Inflation Reduction Act, but lawmakers in both parties have objected to tying it to the must-pass spending bill.

"I am disappointed that unrelated permitting reform was attached to this bill," Senator Patrick J. Leahy, the Vermont Democrat who is the chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, said in a statement. "However, with four days left in the fiscal year, we cannot risk a government shutdown; we must work to advance this bill," he added.

The sentiment was echoed in a separate statement by his House counterpart, Representative Rosa DeLauro, Democrat of Connecticut, who noted that "while the bill provides a bridge to the omnibus, it is not perfect."

The Senate is set to take a first procedural vote on Tuesday, and it appears increasingly unlikely that the stopgap bill will advance with the permitting overhaul bill in tow. Should the package fail to secure enough support, lawmakers may strip out the permitting proposal and pass the government funding bill on its own to avoid a shutdown.

Several Republicans, whose votes are essential in order to clear the 60-vote filibuster threshold in the evenly divided Senate, have said they have little interest in helping to deliver on a promise that prompted Mr. Manchin to drop his opposition to the broader health, climate and tax plan and allow it to pass over their party's unanimous opposition.

In a statement, Senator Richard C. Shelby of Alabama, the top Republican on the Senate Appropriations Committee, acknowledged the "significant progress" made toward a short-term bill that "is as clean as possible." But, he warned, "if the Democrats insist on including permitting reform, I will oppose it."

Lawmakers in both parties have expressed opposition to the details of the permitting legislation, which Mr. Manchin released last week. Republicans have said the legislation does not go far enough to ensure projects are approved more quickly, while liberal Democrats are alarmed at provisions that would make it easier to build fossil fuel infrastructure and guarantee completion of the Mountain Valley Pipeline, a natural gas project that passes through West Virginia.

In an effort to speed up the permitting process, the legislation would instruct agencies to complete required environmental reviews within about two years for major projects and limit the window for court challenges.

Some Democrats, including climate hawks, have signaled they will support the permitting package because they say it will help speed up the construction of transmission lines and other infrastructure needed to combat climate change and help deliver on President Biden's pledge to cut United States emissions [roughly in half](#) by 2030.

"To meet our climate goals, and as renewable energy projects continue to become more economically viable, we must enact reasonable permitting reform — which includes expedited review processes that also maintain fundamental environmental protections," said Representative Sean Casten, Democrat of Illinois, in a statement. "Anything less is failing to do what is scientifically necessary to preserve our planet."

But at least one member of the Democratic caucus, Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont, has confirmed that he will vote against the stopgap spending bill because of the permitting reform legislation, meaning 11 Republicans will need to back the measure to avoid a filibuster if all 49 remaining senators in the Democratic caucus vote for it. In the House, dozens of liberal Democrats have called for a separate vote on the permitting measure.

"Congress has a fundamental choice to make," Mr. Sanders wrote in a letter urging his colleagues to reject the measure. "We can listen to the fossil fuel industry and climate deniers who are spending huge amounts of money on lobbying and campaign contributions to pass this side deal. Or we can listen to the scientists and the environmental community who are telling us loudly and clearly to reject it."

Mr. Manchin has begun a persuasion campaign centered on his Republican colleagues, including [an opinion piece in The Wall Street Journal](#) and an appearance on Fox News.

"It would be basically a lost moment in history if we don't do this," Mr. Manchin declared in an [interview on "Fox News Sunday."](#) Referring to President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, he added: "I'm hoping that they will look at what we have in front of us — the energy independence, security, stopping Putin dead in his tracks, being able to do what we need to do to reduce the price of energy and helping people in their homes as far as energy cost there. We have a golden opportunity."

Ukraine's recent military success, including [reclaiming territory from Russia](#) this month, has rallied lawmakers, who have already approved roughly \$54 billion in military, economic and humanitarian aid this year, behind the prospect of pouring more money into the effort.

The new package would set aside \$3 billion for training, equipment, weapons and intelligence support for Ukrainian forces, as well as \$4.5 billion for the Economic Support Fund, which is intended to help the Ukrainian government continue to function. It also would allow Mr. Biden to authorize the transfer of up to \$3.7 billion of American equipment and weapons to the country.

The legislation also aims to address a few domestic needs. In addition to providing \$20 million to help address [the water crisis](#) in Jackson, Miss., and \$2 billion for a block grant program to help communities rebuild after natural disasters in 2021 and 2022, it would give the federal government more flexibility to spend existing disaster aid quickly.

The package also includes language that would ensure the Food and Drug Administration maintains the ability [to collect industry fees](#) that make up much of its budget.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/26 Russia admits to military draft problems
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/26/world/europe/russia-draft-ukraine-shooting.html
GIST	In a rare admission of official mistakes, the Kremlin acknowledged on Monday that its new military draft to reinforce the Russian assault on Ukraine has been rife with problems. The admission occurred the same day that a man, apparently distraught over the mobilization, shot and seriously wounded a recruitment officer at a draft office in Siberia.

Since President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia [announced a “partial mobilization”](#) last week to call up 300,000 people with military experience to join the fight, there have been widespread reports of [conscription in rural regions](#) that has swept up ethnic minorities and, it appears, people unfit for duty.

Protests have [erupted](#) in far-flung cities, recruitment centers have been the target of arson, and thousands of military-age men have [packed planes and vehicles](#) to flee across Russia’s borders.

The Kremlin’s spokesman, Dmitri S. Peskov, acknowledged on Monday that there had been irregularities in the call-up, but he tried to shift blame to the local authorities carrying out the mobilization among resistant civilians across the country.

“There are cases when the decree has been violated,” Mr. Peskov told reporters during a daily phone call. “In some regions, governors are actively working to correct the situation.”

The governors of several Russian regions — including [Belgorod](#), Kostroma, Vladimir, Yakutia and Magadan in the far east — have acknowledged that men who did not meet the defense ministry’s criteria are being called up.

Mr. Peskov said the problems were being addressed.

“These cases of noncompliance with the required criteria are being eliminated,” he said, “and we hope that the rate of elimination will increase and all errors will be corrected.”

In the eastern region of Irkutsk, the authorities arrested a suspect in the shooting at the draft office. He was identified as Ruslan Zinin, and described as being in his mid-20s.

Mr. Zinin’s mother, Marina Zinina, told a local news outlet that her son had become angry after a close friend received a draft summons despite having never served in the Russian Army. The defense minister pledged last week that only men with military experience and a specialization would be called up.

“Ruslan was very upset because of this,” Ms. Zinina was quoted as saying. “They said that there would be partial mobilization, but it turns out that they are taking everyone.”

For months, Mr. Putin resisted a draft, seeking [to preserve a sense of normalcy](#) in Russia. But with his forces routed in northeastern Ukraine this month and with criticism rising from nationalist and pro-war voices, Mr. Putin has moved to escalate the war effort.

The sudden reversal surprised many Russians and led to widespread rumors that the authorities would close the borders to keep men of military age in the country. But since last Wednesday, [an estimated 261,000 men](#) have fled Russia, according to the independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta, which cited sources in the Russian security services.

With Russia’s military fighting to hold off Ukrainian advances in the east and south, tens of thousands of draft notices have been issued, and analysts say they believe that many recruits will soon be sent to the front lines. But because of Russia’s supply problems and heavy casualties in the war, the analysts say, the Kremlin will most likely struggle to train and equip them.

“The lack of military trainers, and the haste with which Russia has started the mobilization, suggests that many of the drafted troops will deploy to the front line with minimal relevant preparation,” Britain’s defense intelligence agency said on Monday. “They are likely to suffer a high attrition rate.”

Michael Kofman, the director of Russia studies at C.N.A., a defense research institute based in Virginia, said on Monday that the regional agencies calling up Russian men were trying to fill quotas and, apparently, conscripting them without regard to qualifications.

“At first, it obviously looks like a hot mess,” he told the podcast “[War on the Rocks](#).” “That’s very much true, but they are also pulling in quite large numbers of men.”

Russia’s goal, Mr. Kofman said, appears to be getting troops quickly to the battlefield to stabilize its defensive lines and prevent another Ukrainian counterattack before winter sets in. He said a large enough draft could bolster Moscow’s ability to sustain the war, but noted that because the military had already deployed officers and enlisted professionals months ago, it lacked trainers for the new draftees.

“I think they’re going to, at best, get two weeks of refresh or some kind of familiarization training before being sent off,” Mr. Kofman said. “We’re very much in uncharted waters regarding the implications of it and how it will go.”

In another acceleration of the incursion into Ukraine, Moscow and its proxies in four occupied Ukrainian regions began [staging referendums](#) last week on becoming part of Russia. Much of the world has condemned the vote as a sham.

On Monday, Ukraine denounced reports that Ukrainian prisoners of war were being forced to vote in the referendum. Videos from the occupied regions, supported by witness accounts, have shown armed Russian soldiers escorting people to vote. Ukrainian officials have said that residents have been threatened with losing their jobs if they did not cast a ballot, and they have accused the occupying authorities of busing in people from outside Ukraine to stage voting scenes.

The results of the staged vote across the four regions, which amount to an area larger than Portugal, are expected to be announced on Tuesday. The Kremlin is then expected to formally announce the annexation of the regions, a move, analysts say, that may give Moscow another pretext to escalate the war. President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine has warned that the annexation would allow Mr. Putin to claim that he is fighting a defensive war.

Mr. Zelensky also said the Russian leader’s threats to use nuclear weapons should concern Western nations. “I don’t think he’s bluffing,” he [told “Face the Nation”](#) on CBS News on Sunday.

“He wants to scare the whole world,” Mr. Zelensky said. “These are the first steps of his nuclear blackmail.”

Officials in the Biden administration have expressed concern that Mr. Putin could detonate a tactical nuclear weapon on Ukrainian territory or perhaps in a demonstration blast over the Black Sea or the Arctic Ocean. Officials said on Sunday that while they took the threat seriously, there has been no evidence of Russia’s moving those weapons or preparing such a strike.

Jake Sullivan, the U.S. national security adviser, echoed previous private and public warnings that President Biden and his top aides have made to their Russian counterparts.

“We have communicated directly, privately, at very high levels to the Kremlin that any use of nuclear weapons will be met with catastrophic consequences for Russia, that the United States and our allies will respond decisively,” Mr. Sullivan said on the CBS program. “We have been clear and specific about what that will entail.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Germany: leaks Nord Stream gas pipelines
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/27/world/europe/germany-nord-stream-pipelines-leak.html
GIST	Authorities were trying to determine the cause of leaks in two gas pipelines running from Russia to Germany under the Baltic Sea after both experienced a sudden drop in pressure, German and Danish officials said.

Neither of the pipelines, Nord Stream 1 and 2, had been active, but both were filled with natural gas when they experienced a sharp drop in pressure on Monday, which authorities said could only be caused by a leak.

“There must be large holes; otherwise pressure would not fall so quickly,” said Fiete Wulff, a spokesman for Germany’s network agency, on Tuesday. “There is no other way to explain it.”

The pipelines have been a focal point of the broader confrontation between Russia and Europe. After the European Union imposed economic sanctions on Russia to penalize it for invading Ukraine, Russia began withholding the natural gas that for decades it had abundantly sent to Europe, threatening its energy supply as winter looms.

Officials in Germany and Denmark said it was not immediately clear what had caused the leaks but that investigations were underway. The leaks would not affect the security of gas supply to either country, they said.

Russia’s Gazprom halted deliveries through Nord Stream 1 indefinitely earlier this month, as part of a continuing dispute with Germany over gas deliveries. Nord Stream 2 was never made operational after Germany canceled its certification on the eve of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Germany’s energy ministry said in a statement Monday that a grid operator had reported “a sharp drop in pressure” in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. The Danish Maritime Authority said the leak appeared to have occurred off the coast of a Danish island and issued a navigation warning for the area.

Separately, the operator of Nord Stream 1 said it had detected a pressure drop that was later confirmed by the German economy ministry. The pipeline is made up of about 100,000 concrete-coated steel pipes designed to withstand the change in pressure the gas undergoes on the 760 mile journey from Russia to Germany. They lie on the floor of the Baltic Sea.

The head of Germany’s network regulator, Klaus Müller, wrote on Twitter that the country was no longer dependent on Nord Stream 1 but that the development underscored the tense situation around the pipelines.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/26 Iran women center stage anti-govt protests
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/26/world/middleeast/women-iran-protests-hijab.html
GIST	<p>For Yasi, the news felt too close to ignore: A young woman, Mahsa Amini, had died in the custody of Iran’s morality police, days after being arrested for failing to cover her hair modestly enough.</p> <p>When protests broke out after Ms. Amini’s death, 20-year-old Yasi — the first woman in her immediate family to reject the hijab — ran into the streets, waving the thin shawl she usually wears over her blond hair in public, in a grudging concession to the law of the land.</p> <p>“I keep thinking Mahsa could be me; it could be my friends, my cousins,” she said in an interview from Tehran, where protests have since raged every night outside her family’s apartment complex. “You don’t know what they will do to you.”</p> <p>The nationwide protests challenging Iran’s authoritarian leadership, now in their 10th day, have fed on a range of grievances: a collapsing economy, brazen corruption, suffocating repression and social restrictions handed down by a handful of elderly clerics. On Monday, they showed no sign of abating, and neither did the harsh government effort to suppress them despite international condemnation.</p> <p>But their catalyst was the death of Ms. Amini, 22, on Sept. 16 and its connection to the hijab law, the most visible manifestation of a theocracy that makes women second to men in politics, in parenting, in the office and at home.</p>

Tossing head scarves into bonfires, dancing bareheaded before security agents, young women have been at the forefront of these demonstrations, supplying the defining images of defiance.

Iranian women had participated in protests against the clerical establishment before, but never before had they been spark, leaders and foot soldiers all at once. More than two dozen have been arrested so far, and several female protesters have been killed.

It was a female journalist, Niloufar Hamedani of Shargh, an Iranian daily, who first brought Ms. Amini's story to light. Ms. Hamedani was arrested last week and is being held in solitary confinement at Evin prison, according to her colleagues.

"I see a lot of anger and a lot of rage in young women," said Golshan, 28, a women's rights activist from Isfahan who has organized small groups of friends to gather every night to chant, "No to hijab, no to oppression, only equal rights."

The first night of the protests, Golshan and about 50 other women locked arms to block an intersection, calling on men to join them. One man lit a bonfire. One by one, as the crowd cheered, women pulled their hijabs off, waved them aloft and tossed them into the blaze.

"We want to be heard," she said. "We don't have one leader. The beauty and strength of our movement is that every single one of us here is a leader."

Mariam, 34, an artist in northern Mazandaran Province, said she and her friends had not only burned their scarves, they had cut their long hair and shaved their heads.

"It's a statement that doesn't need explaining," she said. "You can't control me and you can't define me with my hair."

Women are paying for their defiance in blood. On Saturday night, the riot police beat Golshan with a baton, leaving her dizzy and in pain, her neck frozen. (Like others interviewed, she insisted on being identified only by her first name to avoid reprisal.)

Two years after ultraconservative Muslim clerics seized power in the 1979 revolution, they required women in government offices to wear the head scarf, then all women and girls over age 9, justifying it with Shariah law. The hijab, they proclaimed, would protect female chastity and honor.

But it has also become a weak point for the regime, symbolizing social restrictions that men and women alike chafe at — and flout behind closed doors.

Iranian women have been contesting the law mandating hijabs and long, loose robes that cloak the body for decades. The women's rights movement has also pushed — with limited success — against laws that allowed men to divorce more easily than women, granted men exclusive custody of children, lifted restrictions on polygamy for men, lowered the marriage age for girls and required women to get their husbands' or fathers' permission to travel.

But the current protests have spread far beyond the usual ranks of activists.

Yasi's mother, Minoo, seeing her daughter in Ms. Amini, signed an online petition by religious women calling for the abolition of the morality police and the repeal of the hijab mandate. Minoo says she wears the head scarf willingly, but the choice should be hers, not the government's.

"We can't impose what we think on one another," she said. "I'm religious, but I'm fed up with the hypocrisy and lies of this regime treating us ordinary people like dirt."

On several nights she has driven Yasi and her friends to protests around Tehran.

Nahid, 65, a retired banker, said she made sandwiches and first-aid kits for the demonstrators every night. She said other women who were not directly participating let protesters sleep in their homes to avoid security forces, and gave them sweet drinks and cakes.

Activists say the response has been made possible by decades of quiet, grass-roots networking, even as prominent rights advocates have been imprisoned or gone into exile.

Under former President Hassan Rouhani, a moderate, young Iranians got used to a degree of flexibility, as the morality police grew less stringent. Long hair snaked from under ever-looser head scarves. Makeup got heavier, hemlines shorter. Clothing once restricted to dark, somber shades turned chartreuse and hot pink, embroidered and appliquéd.

In recent years, some women have dared to go even further, removing their headscarves in public in restaurants and while riding in cars, as Yasi does.

Iranian women “have never conformed to the state’s ideal of what the hijab should look like,” said Sussan Tahmasebi, a veteran Iranian women’s rights activist who lives in exile. “And we see now the emergence of a younger generation that really care about their bodily rights, and the hijab is probably the most visible infringement on their bodily rights.”

Successive governments, including Mr. Rouhani’s, periodically cracked down on hijab noncompliance with fines, arrests and verbal warnings, but hard-liners were impatient to reverse the liberalizing tide. Since Ebrahim Raisi, an ultraconservative, became president a year ago, he has systematically tightened enforcement of strict social and religious rules.

In July, the president ordered all “responsible entities and institutions” to devise a strategy for stepping up hijab enforcement. Violations, he said, were damaging the values of the Islamic Republic and “promoting corruption.”

Iran’s chief prosecutor declared his support for barring women who were improperly covered from getting access to social and government services, including the subway. The Ministry of Guidance ordered movie theaters to stop showing women in ads.

The backlash to the policy has come not just from the country’s secular camp, but also from religious and conservative Iranians who said it would only deepen the divide between the government and its people.

But the clerical establishment was unmoved, blaming the reaction on foreign interference. “In the history of Islamic Iran, the life of the women of Iran has always been associated with chastity and hijab,” Mr. Raisi said last month.

His campaign spurred growing tension and violence in the months before Ms. Amini’s death. Cafes were shut for allowing bareheaded customers. Videos on social media showed morality police officers insulting, beating and dragging women into vans to be sent for “re-education” in proper hijab.

In one widely seen video, the mother of a woman who had been arrested threw herself in front of a moving morality police van, screaming: “My daughter is sick. I beg you not to take her.”

Sapideh Rashno, a 28-year-old writer who had taken off her head scarf on a bus, was caught on video in mid-July arguing with a conservatively dressed woman who berated her for “improper dress.” Ms. Rashno was arrested. Two weeks later, state television broadcast an interview showing her apologizing for the episode, her face bruised and her eyes ringed with purple circles.

Her case prompted a public outcry. But with the explosion of protests, the conversation has moved beyond the hijab to the system itself.

	“The hijab is a symbolic thing that has brought women to the front and center,” said Nazli Kamvari, an Iranian-Canadian feminist author, “but it connects them to all sorts of discrimination that everyone is facing.”
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/26 Russia citizenship to Edward Snowden
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Putin-grants-Russian-citizenship-to-Edward-Snowden-17467432.php
GIST	<p>MOSCOW (AP) — Russia on Monday granted citizenship to former American intelligence contractor Edward Snowden, who fled prosecution after he revealed highly classified U.S. surveillance programs to capture communications and data from around the world.</p> <p>A decree signed Monday by Russian President Vladimir Putin listed Snowden as one of 75 foreign citizens listed as being granted Russian citizenship. After fleeing the U.S. in 2013, Snowden was granted permanent Russian residency in 2020 and said at the time that he planned to apply for Russian citizenship without renouncing his U.S. citizenship.</p> <p>Ties between Washington and Moscow are already at their lowest point in decades following Putin's decision to launch what the Kremlin has dubbed a “special military operation” in Ukraine.</p> <p>While Snowden, 39, is considered by supporters to be a righteous whistleblower who wanted to protect American civil liberties, U.S. intelligence officials have accused him of putting U.S. personnel at risk and damaging national security. He currently faces charges in the United States that could result in decades in prison.</p> <p>“Our position has not changed,” State Department spokesman Ned Price said Monday. “Mr. Snowden should return to the United States where he should face justice as any other American citizen would.”</p> <p>Snowden becomes a Russian citizen as Moscow is mobilizing reservists to go to Ukraine. In Russia, almost every man is considered a reservist until age 65, and officials on Monday stressed that men with dual citizenship are also eligible for the military call-up.</p> <p>Snowden, however, has never served in the Russian armed forces, so he is not eligible to be mobilized, his lawyer Anatoly Kucherena told the Interfax news agency. Having previous combat or military service experience has been considered the main criterion in the call-up.</p> <p>Kucherena told Russia's state news agency RIA Novosti that Snowden's wife, Lindsay Mills, an American who has been living with him in Russia, will also be applying for a Russian passport. The couple has two children.</p> <p>“After two years of waiting and nearly ten years of exile, a little stability will make a difference for my family,” Snowden tweeted Monday. “I pray for privacy for them — and for us all.”</p> <p>Andrei Soldatov, a Russian investigative journalist known for his exposés of Moscow security services, said that “strictly speaking, (Snowden) could be drafted, strictly in theory.” But that would be bad PR for the Kremlin so it won't happen, said Soldatov, who is on Russia's wanted list for “spreading false information.” Russian authorities have also frozen his bank accounts and he lives in exile.</p> <p>Snowden, who has kept a low profile in Russia and occasionally criticized Russian government policies on social media, said in 2019 that he was willing to return to the U.S. if he's guaranteed a fair trial.</p> <p>Snowden has become a well-known speaker on privacy and intelligence, appearing remotely at many events from Russia. But he has been sharply criticized by members of the intelligence community, and current and former officials from both U.S. political parties say he endangered global security by exposing important programs. A U.S. damage assessment of his disclosures is still classified.</p>

James Clapper, who served as U.S. director of national intelligence at the time of the disclosures, said Snowden's grant of citizenship came with "rather curious timing."

"It raises the question — again — about just what he shared with the Russians," Clapper said in an email Monday.

Snowden has denied cooperating with Russian intelligence and was traveling through Moscow when the U.S. revoked his passport.

Snowden leaked documents on the National Security Agency's collection of data passing through the infrastructure of U.S. phone and internet companies. He also released details about the classified U.S. intelligence budget and the extent of American surveillance on foreign officials, including the leaders of U.S.-allied countries.

Snowden says he made the disclosures because he believed the U.S. intelligence community had gone too far and wrongly infringed on civil liberties. He also has said he didn't believe the administration of former President Barack Obama, which was in office when Snowden leaked the records to journalists, would act had he made an internal whistleblower complaint instead.

His decision to turn against the NSA came when he used his programming skills to to create a repository of classified in-house notes on the agency's global snooping and as he built a backup system for agency data, he wrote in his 2019 book "Permanent Record."

Reading through the repository, Snowden said he began to understand the extent of his government's stomping on civil liberties and became "cursed with the knowledge that all of us had been reduced to something like children, who'd been forced to live the rest of their lives under omniscient parental supervision."

Snowden was charged in 2013 with unauthorized disclosure of U.S. national security and intelligence information as well as theft of government property. The three charges each carry a maximum 10-year penalty.

The Justice Department also sued to stop Snowden from collecting profits on his memoir, saying he had violated his nondisclosure agreements with intelligence agencies.

The White House on Monday referred comment on Snowden's citizenship to the Justice Department, citing the pending criminal charges.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/26 Spain knights a Seattle woman
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/seattle-woman-knighted-for-helping-sephardic-jews-become-spanish-citizens/
GIST	<p>In the 15th century, Spain's Queen Isabella and her husband Ferdinand launched the Inquisition that expelled tens of thousands of Jews from their country. Five hundred years later, Spain is making a Jewish Seattle woman a knight in an order named after "Isabella the Catholic," as the queen was known.</p> <p>Some have asked: Is this ironic? But Doreen Alhadeff, who will be awarded the knighthood in an October ceremony at Bellevue's Meydenbauer Center, doesn't see it that way.</p> <p>"Actually, I think it shows unbelievable promise," said Alhadeff, 72.</p> <p>Spain has come a long way in acknowledging its storied and painful Jewish history, Alhadeff maintains, including by passing a 2015 law granting descendants of the Inquisition's victims, those with Sephardic Jewish roots, an opportunity to apply for citizenship.</p>

Approved by Spain's King Felipe VI, Alhadeff's knighthood stems in large part from her work helping Sephardic Jews take advantage of the law allowing them to apply for Spanish citizenship before the application window closed last September. Seattle has the third largest Sephardic population in the U.S., numbering about 5,000.

Alhadeff, a real estate agent and member of a prominent Sephardic family, said she viewed becoming a Spanish citizen in 2016 as regaining something taken from her family and a return to a place that feels deeply familiar.

"When I go to Spain, I feel home," said Alhadeff, who also co-founded a Seattle Sephardic organization and website, and in 2018 was named the U.S. ambassador of a network of Spanish cities with Jewish heritage.

But the citizenship offer has been frustrating for others. While Spain granted the vast majority of applications it has processed, resulting in roughly 42,600 new citizens (including 1,500 Americans) as of late June, it denied 2,500 and has yet to issue a decision on almost half of the applications.

Some have been waiting more than five years for an answer, said Luis Portero, a lawyer in Spain who specializes in helping Sephardic people obtain citizenship in both his country and Portugal, which passed a similar law in 2015. Portugal also has tens of thousands of unresolved cases, according to Portero, but has denied only about 300 applications and granted about 57,000 as of last December.

In Spain, denials have led to lawsuits against the government, including by Seattle's Jennifer McCullum.

"It was devastating," she said of being turned down in 2021, a decision since reversed. "What does this mean if the place that I know my family is from doesn't want me?"

A bond over language

From the start, the Iberian citizenship laws stirred [mixed feelings](#) in Sephardic communities.

Alhadeff knew immediately she wanted to apply. She has felt a keen bond with Spain ever since studying there as a college student and hearing someone utter "mi alma," my soul, the endearment her grandmother used to call her in Ladino, the once commonly-spoken language of Sephardic Jews, derived from Spanish.

As Spain's parliament considered the law, she was in the country helping organize an international conference of Sephardic Jews. Back in the U.S. on the day the law went to a vote, she got up early to see the result.

"When it was passed, I just went into gear," she said.

Alhadeff set about fulfilling the lengthy eligibility requirements: proving one's Sephardic heritage, passing Spanish-language and civics tests through the Cervantes Institute (Seattle has one of only four branches in the U.S.) and traveling to Spain to have documents notarized.

She then turned to spreading the word about the citizenship opportunities and how to apply. She guesses she fielded 100 calls from as far away as Hong Kong and Greece. She also walked her synagogue at the time, Ezra Bessaroth, through a certification process allowing it to testify to people's Sephardic heritage.

Having that heritage, though, did not ensure enthusiasm about Spanish or Portuguese citizenship. Some said they felt a closer connection to countries that took in Sephardic Jews after the Inquisition, such as Greece and Turkey, where many of Seattle's early Sephardic immigrants came from.

Spain's tricky application process discouraged others. Dana Behar, a semi-retired real estate developer in Seattle, said he and his wife knew some Spanish but not enough to pass a language test. They became citizens of Portugal, which had no such test, while their two daughters, minors at the time and not required to take the Spanish test, became citizens of Spain.

This year, after an uproar over a Russian oligarch with ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin getting Portuguese citizenship, Portugal [toughened its eligibility requirements](#) to include proof of a close and ongoing connection to that country.

While it's unknown exactly how many Seattle-area residents have applied for Spanish and Portuguese citizenship, those familiar with the process guess a couple hundred — “a little disappointing,” Alhadeff said.

Still, the worldwide numbers proved overwhelming for the limited number of people processing applications, said Portero, the lawyer in Spain. Contributing to the surge were worldwide upheavals, including Brexit and Venezuela's economic and political crisis, that made a European passport attractive.

Luis Fernando Esteban, Spain's honorary consul in Washington and Oregon, said the country has been doing its best to review applications, given the COVID-19 pandemic, which closed government offices, and the need to weed out fraudulent documentation. While Spain for a time enacted restrictions on entering the country, it made an exception for Sephardic people who needed to have their citizenship applications notarized, he said.

Esteban, who nominated Alhadeff for knighthood, also paid tribute to Spain's centuries-long Jewish history. “The Sephardim came to Spain with the Romans,” he said.

Existential angst

In her journey to reconnect with her family's Spanish history, McCullum spent a year gathering documents for her citizenship application, including a 1984 letter from her grandmother on the eve of a cousin's bat mitzvah, a Jewish coming-of-age ritual.

“You have a Spanish grandmother and this is the story,” read the four-page letter, which proceeded to lay out the family's Sephardic roots. Her father, McCullum's great-grandfather, was a rabbi who came from Turkey. Her mother, McCullum's great-grandmother, immigrated to the U.S. from Salonica, Greece (now known as Thessaloniki), once a thriving center of Sephardic life. Many family members who remained died during the Nazi occupation of Greece.

“The language at home in New York City was Ladino,” McCullum's grandmother continued, adding that she didn't speak English until she went to kindergarten. “Friday night, was not chicken soup and gefilte fish,” she wrote, referring to traditional foods on the Jewish sabbath of Ashkenazi Jews, whose ancestors descended from Central and Eastern Europe, “but chicken in tomato sauce, rice and beans.”

With this description of her lineage in hand, McCullum flew to Spain in 2018 to finalize her application, then spent three years waiting for the answer: a denial, which said she needed more proof of her Sephardic ancestry in the form of a certificate from a Spanish Jewish federation. She said she felt not only rejected but also an existential angst.

“It felt like being told I wasn't who I am,” she said.

McCullum appealed, got no answer for months, and filed a lawsuit in Madrid. Three months later, this past July, Spain's Ministry of Justice notified her that it had changed its position, entitling her to Spanish citizenship.

McCullum, who recently became assistant director of UW's Sephardic Studies Program, has taken the decision as a joyous confirmation of her family's “origin story.” She long hadn't let herself believe she'd get citizenship and doesn't yet know how she'll use her new rights.

She could live in Spain at some point, or try to get Spanish citizenship for her 3-year-old daughter, who might someday want to study or work there.

	"It feels like the possibilities are endless," McCullum said.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/26 Seattle-Vancouver BC Amtrak service
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/amtrak-service-from-seattle-to-vancouver-b-c-returns/
GIST	<p>For the first time since 2020, an Amtrak train left Seattle en route to Vancouver, British Columbia, on Monday morning, reestablishing a connection between the two cities that was lost due to the pandemic. There will be one daily round trip to start, leaving Seattle at 7:45 a.m. and arriving in Vancouver at 11:45 a.m., with five stops in between. The return trip will leave Vancouver at 5:45 p.m. and arrive in Seattle at 10:10 p.m.</p> <p>Amtrak hopes to add a second trip in the future as "staffing and equipment allow."</p> <p>The restoration of the scenic northern Amtrak Cascades trip along water and past mountains was greeted warmly by passengers and elected officials frustrated at its slow return. Amtrak spokesperson Olivia Irvin said Monday's departure was about 70% full and that the train company is "seeing a lot of interest" in the route.</p> <p>"I hear from a lot of folks, when is this going to start again? When is this going to start again?" U.S. Rep. Rick Larsen, D-Everett, said while celebrating the reopening Monday. During the line's closure, Amtrak ran bus shuttle services to the north, which Larsen said showed that "the foundation of ridership never went away for Amtrak Cascades."</p> <p>The northbound line went quiet in the early days of the pandemic, as the border between the U.S. and Canada was shuttered. But the line did not resume even after travel between the two countries once again became possible.</p> <p>Amtrak has blamed staffing for lingering service disruptions. In a recent hearing of the U.S. Senate Transportation Committee, Washington Sen. Maria Cantwell rejected staffing issues as an excuse for lagging travel.</p> <p>"Everybody in America has workforce issues," she told nominees for director of the Amtrak board of directors. "But what I didn't hear enough of is, what does Amtrak believe they need to do about that, to get the services reestablished that we need in America?"</p> <p>Amtrak is set to receive \$66 billion as part of the federal infrastructure bill signed into law last year by President Joe Biden.</p> <p>While both Seattle and Vancouver have thriving food scenes, riders who get hungry on the way will find a fully functional dining car.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/26 CBO: cancel student loan debt \$400B cost
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/us-policy/2022/09/26/cbo-student-loan-forgiveness-biden/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON – A White House plan to cancel student loan debt for tens of millions of Americans will cost roughly \$400 billion, according to a new estimate by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, increasing federal budget deficits over the next decade and beyond.</p> <p>The administration's plan to temporarily extend an existing pause on student loan payments would further increase the cost, the CBO found, by roughly \$20 billion.</p> <p>The new cost estimate will add fresh fuel to the debate over President Joe Biden's decision to cancel up to \$20,000 in student debt for eligible borrowers, a policy cheered by advocates as transformative for the middle class but assailed by Republican lawmakers as a wasteful and inefficient use of government funds.</p>

Delivered Monday in a letter to lawmakers, the estimate was requested by Republican leaders of the House and Senate education committees.

The CBO estimate does not address a simultaneous move by the White House to lower the amount borrowers can be forced to repay each month on their student loans, from 10 percent of their current income to 5 percent. That policy is expected to cost an additional \$120 billion, according to estimates from the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a D.C.-based think tank that has opposed Biden's policy. Critics have complained that the president acted unilaterally – without approval of Congress – to forgive the loans and incur the hefty costs.

“The president announced possibly the most expensive executive action in history without a score, and we’re now seeing just how expensive this policy is going to be,” said Marc Goldwein, senior vice president and senior policy director at the CRFB.

More than 40 million Americans could receive some level of student loan relief under Biden's plan, which is set to take effect later this year. Sixty percent of borrowers are expected to have their debt reduced by the full \$20,000, according to administration estimates; half could see their debt canceled completely.

The roughly \$420 billion price tag is equal to the cost of the \$1,400 stimulus checks Biden sent to Americans at the start of his presidency. And it exceeds the savings Democrats achieved in the recently-approved Inflation Reduction Act, which Biden has touted for lowering federal budget deficits, Goldwein said. But assessing the cost of student-debt forgiveness is more complicated than those more straightforward spending policies.

Once enacted, Biden's forgiveness plan will immediately wipe out roughly \$400 billion in assets on the federal government's ledger. But because those assets had been expected to be repaid over time, the impact on federal budget deficits will also be stretched out. White House officials have argued that the impact from reduced loan payments would amount to less than \$300 billion over the next decade, and said the CBO's score should be looked at over a 30-year window.

The release of the CBO report revived a long-running debate among economic experts over how to appropriately assess the cost of the debt cancellation. Briefing reporters on Monday, senior administration officials pointed to the CBO's disclaimer that its estimates “are highly uncertain” because of wide disagreement about how much of the forgiven loans would otherwise have been repaid.

Supporters of student debt cancellation argue that the true cost of the program is likely to be much smaller than official projections because many borrowers never actually repay the money they owe. Marshall Steinbaum, an economist at the University of Utah who supports debt cancellation, said his research suggests that more than 60 percent of outstanding student loans have balances that rise over time – suggesting they are unlikely to be paid off.

“A very large share of already outstanding student debt was not going to be repaid anyway,” Steinbaum said, “so I’m curious how the CBO will account for the fact that most student debt was already uncollectable.”

Administration officials also argue that the CBO overestimates the number of borrowers who will qualify for debt forgiveness, which are likely to be lowered by barriers to applying. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity, to explain internal White House deliberations about the policy. The CBO estimates that 90 percent of eligible borrowers will participate in the program.

Last month, White House National Economic Council deputy director Bharat Ramamurti told reporters that the cancellation policy would reduce average annual revenue from the student loan program by \$24 billion per year over the next decade.

“The Biden-Harris Administration's student debt relief plan provides breathing room to tens of millions of working families,” said White House spokesman Abdullah Hasan. “It gives people who have been

struggling with student debt that shot they want at starting a business, buying that first home, or just having a slightly easier time paying the monthly bills.”

A recent analysis by the Census Bureau said Black and Hispanic women could benefit the most from the one-time cancellation policy. Both groups hold a disproportionate share of education debt relative to their peers.

White House officials have said the typical Black borrower will see their balance cut nearly in half, and more than one in four will have their debt erased altogether, even before applying the additional \$10,000 for Pell recipients.

Roughly 8 million borrowers, whose income is already on file at the department, will have their loans automatically forgiven without having to apply, according to the Education Department. Everyone else will have to apply in early October, when the agency expects to release the form.

GOP lawmakers and state attorneys general have said they are exploring the possibility of a lawsuit to overturn the policy before it takes effect. One conservative group, the Job Creators Network, has said it plans to sue the administration once the Education Department guidance is released.

“CBO’s \$400 billion cost estimate shows this administration has lost all sense of fiscal responsibility,” said Rep. Virginia Foxx (N.C.), the top Republican on the House Education Committee. “Rather than working with Congress to bring down college costs, President Biden has opted to bury the American people under our unsustainable debt.”

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) and Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), who led the charge on debt forgiveness, released a joint statement taking issue with the assumptions underlying the CBO analysis.

“The pandemic payment pause and student debt cancellation are policies that demonstrate how government can and should invest in working people, not the wealthy and billionaire corporations,” the pair said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/26 Canada drops mask requirement on planes
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/canada-wont-require-masks-on-planes-will-drop-vaccine-mandate-for-entry/
GIST	<p>TORONTO (AP) — The Canadian government announced Monday it will no longer require people to wear masks on planes to guard against COVID-19.</p> <p>Transport Canada said the existing rules for masks will come off Oct. 1</p> <p>“We are able to do this because tens of millions of Canadians rolled up their sleeves and got vaccinated,” Transport Minister Omar Alghabra said.</p> <p>Health Minister Jean-Yves Duclos said the negative attitudes of some passengers have made it hard for airlines and crews to enforce the mask mandate in recent months, and cited that as a factor in the decision.</p> <p>Government officials also confirmed Canada is dropping the vaccine requirement for people entering the country at the end of the month. The Associated Press reported last week that was likely.</p> <p>Canada, like the United States, requires foreign nationals to be vaccinated when entering the country. No change in the mandate is expected in the U.S. in the near term.</p> <p>Unvaccinated foreign travelers who are allowed to enter Canada are currently subject to mandatory arrival tests and a 14-day quarantine.</p>

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government has agreed to let a cabinet order enforcing mandatory COVID-19 vaccination requirements at the border expire Sept. 30.

The government is also ending random COVID-19 testing at airports. Filling out information in what became an unpopular ArriveCan app will also no longer be required. Some blamed it for delays at airports.

The government will also no longer be required passengers to have pre-board tests for cruise ships.

"The removal of border measures has been facilitated by a number of factors, including modelling that indicates that Canada has largely passed the peak of the Omicron BA.4- and BA.5-fuelled wave, Canada's high vaccination rates, lower hospitalization and death rates, as well as the availability and use of vaccine boosters (including new bivalent formulation), rapid tests, and treatments for COVID-19," the government said in a release.

Removal of the vaccine mandate for non-citizens entering Canada means unvaccinated professional athletes like Major League Baseball players would be allowed to play in Toronto in the playoffs should the Blue Jays make the postseason.

It would also apply to the National Basketball Association and the National Hockey League. Unvaccinated players are currently not allowed to cross the border into Canada.

The Public Health Agency of Canada still strongly recommends that people wear masks, particularly in crowded environments such as planes and trains.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/26 Covid questions still pending answers
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/09/26/covid-questions-variants-long-covid/
GIST	<p>Since a new coronavirus launched the global pandemic that has now killed more than 6.5 million people — 16% of them in the United States alone — scientists in record numbers have devoted themselves full time to unraveling its mysteries.</p> <p>In less than three years, researchers have published more than 200,000 studies about the virus and COVID-19. That is four times the number of scientific papers written on influenza in the past century and more than 10 times the number written on measles.</p> <p>Still, the virus has kept many of its secrets, from how it mutates so rapidly to why it kills some while leaving others largely unscathed — mysteries that if solved might arm the world's scientists with new strategies to curb its spread and guard against the next pandemic. Here are some of the most pressing questions they are trying to answer:</p> <p>— — —</p> <p>Where did the virus come from, and why has it been so successful?</p> <p>Scientists have found very similar viruses in horseshoe bats living in remote caves in Laos, southern China, and other parts of Southeast Asia. So far, though, no one has succeeded in drawing a line between the viruses in bats and the Huanan Seafood Market, which sold and butchered live animals in Wuhan, China, and where many scientists believe the virus first spilled over into people.</p> <p>That theory is backed by multiple lines of evidence, including the clustering of early COVID cases around the market — documentation laid out in two peer-reviewed papers published this summer. But key details remain elusive. We do not know where in the market the leap from animals to humans took place, or which animals were involved. Nor do we know the precise steps in the process.</p> <p>"What particularly drove that spillover?" asked Vincent Munster, chief of the virus ecology section at Rocky Mountain Laboratories, a research facility in Hamilton, Mont., that is part of the National Institute</p>

of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. “We’ve now identified 20 or 30 of these viruses that all look very similar, but they are not the same. What is the true hideout place of the progenitor of SARS-CoV-2?”

Several investigations have not been able to categorically rule out the possibility the virus escaped from a laboratory in China, although many scientists believe that is far less likely than that it jumped from animals as part of a natural process.

Escape from a lab could involve at least two scenarios: one, in which the virus evolved in nature and was being studied by scientists; another in which the virus was created in the lab by researchers examining factors that might cause a coronavirus to become more deadly or more transmissible.

Scientists working at the Wuhan Institute of Virology, a major research center that studies coronaviruses, have denied ever having the virus in their laboratories, but that has never been corroborated by outside investigators since Chinese authorities limited access.

Whatever its origins, SARS-CoV-2 has proved far more successful at infecting large numbers of people than other coronaviruses, including the one that surfaced in Asia 20 years ago causing severe acute respiratory syndrome, a less contagious though also sometimes fatal illness. Both coronaviruses invade human cells through a spike protein that attaches to the ACE2 receptor on the surface of human cells. Yet the trajectories of the two pathogens could hardly be more different.

The original SARS, which emerged in China in late 2002, sickened 8,098 people, killing 774. But that outbreak was over within a year due in large part to 19th century public health measures such as social distancing and isolation of the infected — many of the same steps public health officials have urged during the current pandemic.

However, SARS patients, unlike those in this pandemic, “are most likely to be contagious only when they have symptoms, such as fever or cough,” according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That made it easier to identify and isolate them.

Resolving the uncertainties surrounding how SARS-CoV-2 was first transmitted to people and why it has thrived are “extraordinary questions,” Munster said, “because they would actually tie back to preparation for the next pandemic which everybody is worried about.”

How is the virus evolving, and will there be new variants?

Early on, scientists delivered a seemingly comforting message about coronaviruses, the family to which SARS-CoV-2 belongs: Other viruses acquire mutations more frequently, making them more difficult to keep up with and raising the possibility they will develop more contagious or deadly versions.

Coronaviruses have their own proofreading system that helps limit mutations as the virus makes copies of itself.

But the reassuring message was soon followed by a parade of Greek letters — alpha, beta, delta, now omicron — signifying new, more contagious and occasionally more lethal variants of the virus. These variants are able to dodge the disease-fighting antibodies that protect people after being infected or vaccinated.

At least some of the virus’s rapid evolution has occurred inside the bodies of severely immunocompromised patients, where it was able to linger, replicate and mutate for months.

“We know that unfortunately immunocompromised people are a major breeding ground for these noxious variants because of the accelerated evolution of the virus inside them,” said Eric Topol, a professor of molecular medicine at Scripps Research Institute in La Jolla, Calif. “With all of the tens of millions of immunocompromised people around the world, the one that gave birth to omicron — what was it about that person?”

Because vaccination can pose a risk to some people with weakened immune systems, some did not take the vaccine, leaving them vulnerable to the virus and especially to long illnesses. The longer the virus remains inside a person, the more copies of itself it makes, each one offering a fresh chance to develop a mutation.

“But the language of the virus, the way it really comes up with ways to hurt us and infect us, and hijack our cells,” said Topol, “It’s always ahead of us and then we say, ‘Oh, that’s how it did it.’
“But we haven’t cracked its code.”

It is unlikely the virus has finished mutating or churning out new variants. Scientists believe it will continue evolving to become better at escaping the human immune system. But researchers are uncertain what future variants might look like.

“The virus is becoming more infectious, but less dangerous for the majority of people,” said Bill Powderly, co-director of the Division of Infectious Diseases at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. “But we’ve no guarantee that the virus wouldn’t develop additional mutations that would eventually make it more virulent in the future.”

An additional concern is whether animals infected with the coronavirus might become reservoirs for the evolution of new variants that might jump back into humans. According to a report last January, the virus had already been found in 29 other mammals. To date, incidents of animals infecting humans are rare. But some scientists fear that if the virus continues to spread to new species, it might pick up mutations as it adjusts to the environment inside those animals and then, transmit potentially more dangerous variants back to humans.

Can we develop a coronavirus vaccine that will protect against future variants?

The swift development of vaccines to protect against severe illness and death from COVID-19 has been hailed as one of the great scientific achievements of this century. But the vaccines did not, as some had hoped, bring the pandemic to an end. They provided protection against severe illness and death, but not infection and transmission, especially after the arrival of the more transmissible delta and omicron variants.

“They’ve been extremely effective, but they also have their shortcomings,” said Mark Siedner, an infectious-disease doctor at Massachusetts General Hospital. “Immunity wanes, and their ability to protect us against newer variants has been variable — in some cases quite strong, in other cases, not as good as we’d like.”

Even people who were fully vaccinated have become infected with the latest iterations of the virus. The United States still records more than 50,000 new daily infections and 400 deaths daily, according to seven-day averages compiled by The Washington Post.

While a new booster shot targeting both the original strain of the virus, as well as the now-dominant omicron subvariants, was authorized in late August by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, some argue that reconfiguring vaccines to match the last variant will always put us one step behind the virus.

Jeffrey Shaman, director of the climate and health program at the Columbia Mailman School of Public Health, said the goal should be to develop a comprehensive vaccine that could protect against every version of SARS-CoV-2 — those we know about and those still to come.

“Can we develop a universal vaccine, effective across all existing and forthcoming variants, that confers sterilizing immunity, in other words that prevents infection altogether?” he said.

Developing such a vaccine poses challenges, acknowledged Stuart Cohen, chief of infectious diseases at UC Davis Health. In the meantime, “the beauty of [existing] RNA vaccines is that they can modify them very quickly,” he said.

Scientists developed the mRNA vaccines by examining the part of the virus that has the most contact with the cells in our immune system — commonly referred to as the spike protein. “But the problem with these variants is that this is the exact part of the virus that is changing the most,” Siedner said.

The newly configured booster shots focus on the spike protein, too, but use two versions of it: one from the original strain identified in Wuhan; and another from the omicron variant.

One strategy researchers are hoping will improve vaccines is to target them not only to the virus’s spike protein, but to other viral proteins as well.

Another potential improvement in the pipeline is development of a nasal-spray vaccine inhaled through the nose. “Maybe these will work on the respiratory tract more,” said Bernard Camins, medical director for infection prevention at the Mount Sinai Health System. “But we don’t know that yet.”

For the near-term, Siedner said, we may need to modify vaccines the way we do with influenza, by changing them each year.

That idea was recently shared by White House coronavirus coordinator Ashish Jha, who said Americans should prepare to receive an annual booster shot against COVID just as they do with the flu. Ideally people could be immunized against COVID and flu during the same medical visit, he said.

Why do some people develop long COVID?

About 1 in 5 COVID-19 survivors in the United States, including some who were never very sick as a result of their infections, go on to develop long COVID, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The condition itself is one huge question mark — a persistent illness marked by a variety of symptoms including fatigue, fever, shortness of breath, chest pain, pounding heart, headaches, difficulty thinking or concentrating, dizziness and joint pain.

“What are the drivers, and what are the causes?” said Gary Gibbons, director of the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, part of the National Institutes of Health. “We see the phenomenon in terms of all these symptoms, but why? What’s generating them?”

To develop treatments, researchers must answer such questions. For example, the condition may be caused by virus hiding out in the body, even after acute infection passes. If that is the case, Gibbons said, the answer may be using antivirals to clear more or all of the virus from the body.

Another theory is that minute blood clots, remaining after the viral assault or fueled by the body’s response, continue to have a punishing effect on different parts of the body.

A third notion is that the symptoms are caused not by the virus, but by an immune system gone haywire. The disease “has a hidden burden,” said Maria Elena Bottazzi, associate dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine. She said the long-term effects on the brain, including brain fog and mental health complications, bear some similarity to those of Lyme disease, which is transmitted by infected ticks.

In December 2020, Congress approved spending more than \$1.1 billion to study long-term effects and possible treatments for COVID-19 and long COVID. So far, the project has awarded \$37 million to 40 research studies, but millions of sufferers say they have yet to find meaningful treatments.

Why does COVID severity differ by age and from one person to another?

When deaths from COVID-19 are charted by age they form a ladder. The younger the patient, the less risk of severe illness or death.

Worldwide, children and adolescents under the age of 20, account for just .4 percent of all the deaths from COVID-19, according to UNICEF.

“Young kids, even really young kids, are much less susceptible to severe disease than older people,” said Stephen Goldstein, a postdoctoral fellow studying coronaviruses at University of Utah.

“If you’re 40, your absolute risk is still pretty low, but it’s much higher than somebody who’s 5. Why is it better to be 1 than 50? I mean, a 1-year-old with influenza, that’s bad.”

The opposite was true in the 1918 flu pandemic when the highest mortality rates were in children 5 and under, adults 20 to 40 and seniors 65 and older. In the 1957 flu pandemic, the highest death rates were among children 5 and under and seniors 65 and over.

Even within the same age group, SARS-CoV-2 can have vastly differently outcomes, killing one patient while sparing another of the same age who appears to have a similar health profile. Scientists believe that genetic factors and the amount of virus someone has in their body may influence the severity of their illness but how some of those factors play out is still largely unknown.

What is clear is that the human immune system declines as we age, leaving older people more vulnerable to pathogens. Also, COVID-19 presents a greater risk for severe illness to people already afflicted with some of the most common diseases of aging such as cancer, chronic lung diseases, heart disease and stroke.

Goldstein said the differing responses to the virus of young and old may have something to do with interferon, a protein that alerts the body’s natural immune system. “Maybe kids make more interferon, and maybe they make it earlier,” Goldstein speculated. “I think that’s probably the key.”

A report in Nature examined differences between the immune systems of adults and children, and found that cells in the airways of healthy children were already in an “interferon-activated state,” and ramped up further after infection with the coronavirus.

The researchers suggested that those innate interferon responses in children restrain the virus and progression of the disease.

Other scientists have suggested that children’s developing immune systems have lower levels of the proteins that can cause the potentially deadly immune response known as a cytokine storm. Another possible explanation is that children have more of the master cells capable of repairing damaged lungs.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/26 Gas prices rise in Washington
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/traffic/gas-prices/gas-prices-rise-washington-lengthy-period-decline/281-fa3f7989-ffc5-4266-95f5-3cfd9089ef4d
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — After 14 weeks of decline, gas prices rose once again in Washington this week, according to GasBuddy data compiled from more than 11 million individual price reports covering over 150,000 stations nationwide.</p> <p>The average price for a gallon of gas in King County Monday was \$4.828, with Pierce County coming just below that at \$4.696. Some counties like Lewis have average prices coming in above \$5.</p> <p>The Seattle-Bellevue-Everett metro area had an average gas price of \$5.10, up from \$4.83 a week ago, per AAA. Tacoma was slightly below that at \$4.96 a gallon Monday, up from \$4.57.</p> <p>"This is honestly one of the reasons I'm thinking that do I really need to be living in the city when it is so expensive," said Kumail Ally from a Seattle gas station.</p>

	<p>Washington's average gas price still comes in well above the national average at just over \$4.70 a gallon, per GasBuddy. AAA's average price tracker has Washington at \$4.92 a gallon, up nearly 30 cents over last week's figure.</p> <p>The national average has risen 2.3 cents from a week ago to \$3.67 per gallon.</p> <p>The national average price Monday is down 17.5 cents from a month ago, but still is up nearly 50 cents over this time last year.</p> <p>Diesel's price nationally has declined 5.1 cents in the last week to \$4.88 a gallon.</p> <p>“One of the longest gas price declines on record has finally come to an end after 14 weeks, with gas prices shooting up in several regions amidst myriad refinery issues from the West Coast to the Great Lakes and in between,” said Patrick De Haan, head of petroleum analysis at GasBuddy. “I don’t know that I’ve ever seen a wider gamut of price behaviors coast to coast in my career.”</p> <p>Crude oil prices continue to slide as interest rates are raised, with a barrel of West Texas Intermediate crude oil down 59 cents to \$78.15 a gallon.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 Haiti facing 'humanitarian catastrophe'
SOURCE	https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/27/haiti-facing-humanitarian-catastrophe-says-un-envoy
GIST	<p>Officials have warned of “new levels of desperation” in Haiti as multiple crises have been compounded by recent protests, the looting of millions of dollars in humanitarian aid and an ongoing “siege” of a key fuel terminal.</p> <p>Speaking to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on Monday, Haiti’s envoy, Helen La Lime warned that “an economic crisis, a gang crisis and a political crisis have converged into a humanitarian catastrophe”.</p> <p>The situation has worsened amid widespread looting and protests that followed Prime Minister Ariel Henry’s announcement of fuel price hikes on September 11.</p> <p>About 4.9 million Haitians were already in a state of humanitarian need ahead of the latest unrest, Le Lime told the council.</p> <p>“In the last two weeks alone, attacks on WFP (World Food Programme) have resulted in the loss of some 2,000 tonnes of food aid valued at close to \$5m, that would have collectively supported up to 200,000 of the most vulnerable Haitians over the next month,” she said.</p> <p>Lime said the Varreux fuel terminal in Port au Prince has been in a “state of siege” for more than a week, blocked off by criminal gangs who have dug trenches and obstructed roads with fuel containers around the site.</p> <p>She added that fuel shortages have hobbled the country’s ability to function and have forced some hospitals to close.</p> <p>The shortages have also forced the largest industrial park in Haiti, Caracol, to cease operating, “which could cause the loss of 12,000 jobs,” Haitian Foreign Minister Jean Victor Geneus told the council. He said private companies are expected to leave the Caribbean nation and it was unclear if schools would be able to open by the already postponed date of October 3.</p> <p>Meanwhile, WFP Deputy Executive Director Valerie Guarnieri said food insecurity was expected to increase in Haiti this year, “surpassing the record high of 4.5 million people estimated to face crisis or worse levels of acute food insecurity, including 1.3 million people in emergency”.</p>

	<p>In recent years, frequent natural disasters have wreaked havoc on Haiti's economy, which has struggled since a devastating 2010 earthquake that killed as many as 220,000 people in the country of 11 million. The assassination of President Jovenel Moise in July of 2021 further cast the country into uncertainty.</p> <p>Amid the insecurity, powerful gangs have jockeyed for influence, often leading to violent battles for control. For months, gangs have blocked roads from the capital to the country's rural provinces, upending government services and complicating efforts by humanitarian groups to distribute aid.</p> <p>During the meeting on Monday, Foreign Minister Geneus called on "robust support" from the international community for the Haitian police against armed gangs, while maintaining that violence was "generally under control and calm has returned to several parts of the country".</p> <p>The meeting comes after the UNSC, in July, adopted a resolution asking UN member states to ban the transfer of small arms to gangs operating in Haiti, while falling short of a Chinese demand to enforce an embargo.</p> <p>The United States and Mexico, which drafted the July resolution, are working on a new text "proposing specific measures to enable the Security Council to address many challenges facing the people of Haiti," US Ambassador Jeffrey DeLaurentis said.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/26 Philippines to shut offshore gambling firms
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/09/26/business/philippine-pogo-gambling-shuts-chinese-workers-deport-intl-hnk/index.html
GIST	<p>The Philippines will stop operations of 175 offshore gambling firms and deport about 40,000 Chinese workers, a justice ministry official said on Monday, part of a crackdown on the notoriously opaque online gaming industry.</p> <p>The sector emerged in the Philippines in 2016 and grew exponentially, as operators capitalized on the country's liberal gaming laws to target customers in China, where gambling is banned.</p> <p>At their peak, Philippine offshore gambling operators, or POGOs, employed more than 300,000 Chinese workers, but the pandemic and higher taxes have forced many to operate elsewhere.</p> <p>"The crackdown was triggered by reports of murder, kidnapping and other crimes committed by Chinese nationals against fellow Chinese nationals," justice ministry spokesperson Jose Dominic Clavano said.</p> <p>The POGOs targeted for closure had licenses that either expired or were revoked, for violations like non-payment of government fees, Clavano said, adding the deportation of the Chinese workers would start next month.</p> <p>The government generated 7.2 billion pesos (\$122.21 million) in 2020 and 3.9 billion last year in POGO fees alone, according to the finance ministry. Economists estimate considerably larger amounts are being spent on taxes, workers' spending and office rental.</p> <p>Online casinos, such as this platform operated by Oriental Game, allow players to wager money from abroad on games carried out in real life in the Philippines.</p> <p>China's embassy in Manila in a statement said Beijing supports the deportation and crackdown on POGO-related crimes, adding the government "firmly opposes and takes tough measures to combat gambling."</p> <p>The Philippines regulator, which recently said there were 30 licensed POGO firms versus 60 before the pandemic, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.</p>

	<p>Real estate consultancy Leechiu Property Consultants estimates that a complete exit of the POGO industry would leave vacant 1.05 million square meters (259 acres) of office space – a third of the size of New York’s Central Park – and 8.9 billion pesos (\$151 million) in foregone annual rent.</p> <p>The sector employs 201,000 Chinese and 111,000 Filipinos, according to Leechiu’s data, which estimates POGOs deliver 190 billion pesos (\$3.22 billion) to the economy each year, a boon to the property and retail sectors.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/26 US Navy most advanced warship in Asia
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/09/26/asia/uss-zumwalt-warship-us-navy-deployment-intl-hnk-ml/index.html
GIST	<p>Seoul, South KoreaCNN — The US Navy’s most advanced surface warship is showing its stealthy profile in the western Pacific on a mission that may set the stage for the eventual deployment of US hypersonic missiles to the region.</p> <p>The USS Zumwalt is the first in a class of three multimission guided missile destroyers the Navy says will “create a new level of battlespace complexity for potential adversaries.”</p> <p>In the Pacific, one of those potential adversaries is obviously China, and the Zumwalt will certainly get Beijing’s attention.</p> <p>“The presence of a stealth warship will draw a great deal of (Chinese) interest,” especially if the Zumwalt is outfitted with hypersonic weapons, said analyst Carl Schuster, a former US Navy captain.</p> <p>And that time may not be far off.</p> <p>An August report from the US Naval Institute said the Zumwalt will be upgraded next year to accommodate the Pentagon’s Common Hypersonic Glide Body (C-HGB), a weapons system that uses a booster rocket motor to fire missiles at hypersonic speed.</p> <p>According to a May 2022 Congressional Research Service report, “the C-HGB is to be maneuverable, making it more difficult to detect and intercept and can travel at Mach 5 or higher ... at least five times faster than the speed of sound or up to 13,000 miles (20,921 kilometers) per hour.</p> <p>“The C-HGB is intended to be able to destroy targets by virtue of its velocity alone,” the report said. After making a port call in Guam last week, the Zumwalt arrived in Japan on Monday, US Navy 7th Fleet spokesperson Lt. Mark Langford said.</p> <p>A Navy statement said the warship has been assigned to Destroyer Squadron 15, the US Navy’s largest destroyer squadron based outside of the United States, operating out of Yokosuka Naval Base near Tokyo. Zumwalt “plays in integral role in maintaining our competitive edge and assuring our allies and partners in the region,” said Lt. Katherine Serrano, a spokesperson for Destroyer Squadron 15.</p> <p>Zumwalt dwarfs other US destroyers</p> <p>At 610 feet (185 meters) long and displacing 16,000 metric tons, the Zumwalt is “the largest and most technologically advanced surface combatant in the world,” according to a Navy fact sheet.</p> <p>In contrast, Arleigh Burke-class destroyers, the backbone of the US Navy’s fleet, are about 100 feet (30 meters) shorter with a displacement under 10,000 tons.</p> <p>China’s biggest surface combatant, the Type 055 destroyer, displaces around 12,000 to 13,000 tons. But while China’s People’s Liberation Army Navy can’t match Zumwalt’s size, it can certainly win the battle for quantity.</p>

The US Navy will have only three ships in the Zumwalt class, the others being the USS Michael Mansoor and the future USS Lyndon B. Johnson.

The PLA Navy has six Type 055s active and more are expected to be coming as part of a massive shipbuilding program that has seen the Chinese naval fleet overtake the US to become the world's largest.

USS Zumwalt is armed with 80 vertical launch cells for missiles that can strike land and sea targets as well as anti-submarine rockets, but the Type 055 has 112 launch cells capable of the same tasks.

The US Navy says the Zumwalt boasts an array of innovations, most striking among them is its stealthy design.

“The wave-piercing tumblehome hull design has facilitated a wide array of advancements. The composite superstructure significantly reduces radar cross section and other signatures, making the ship harder to detect by enemies at sea,” according to the Navy fact sheet.

A troubled program

The Zumwalt class of the destroyers has been a controversial and costly program for the US Navy. With research and development costs rolled in, the three ships in the class come with a price tag of about \$8 billion each, according to a 2018 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report to Congress.

That per-ship price tag would have been considerably reduced if the Navy had gone ahead with its original plan to build 32 of the massive destroyers, but that number was reduced to the current three after the service decided the Zumwalt class would need substantial modifications to perform an anti-ballistic missile defense mission, something the Arleigh Burkes could do more cheaply, according to the Congressional Research Service.

The ships have also been slow to come on line. Zumwalt was commissioned in 2016, but it took four years for the Navy to accept final delivery from shipbuilder General Dynamics after all its systems were checked out.

While movements of a warship are normally referred to as deployments, the Navy is not using that term for the Zumwalt's current presence in the Pacific, a Navy official said.

“While the ship and crew are being tasked as ships normally would be, their employment is part of the fleet integration process of introducing a class of ship into the operational environment and understanding how it can best operate with other ships/platforms,” the official said.

Schuster, the Hawaii-based analyst, called the Zumwalt's movements “more political than military” until the Navy can get those hypersonic weapons aboard.

“At over \$8 billion each, Navy is struggling to find a mission for these presently lightly armed ships,” he said.

Still, he said, it will give the PLA Navy something to think about.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 War at dangerous tipping point
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/09/27/europe/putin-binary-moment-russia-ukraine-war-tipping-analysis-intl/index.html
GIST	The chaos of the past week might be incorrectly comforting. Despite Russia's continued disastrous handling of its war of choice in Ukraine , the conflict's most dangerous moment may be nearing.

At some point this week, the Kremlin will likely declare that [“sham” referendums](#) in four partially occupied areas of Ukraine have delivered a mandate for their swift assimilation into what Moscow calls Russian territory.

The referendums are illegal under international law, and Ukraine, the United States and the rest of NATO have already made it clear this move will have no legal standing and will lead to sanctions.

But it will happen nonetheless, and Russia will likely use the moment to amplify the central threat behind this charade, stated openly by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at the weekend: that Moscow reserves the right to “fully protect” areas that have formally become its territory.

Moscow’s [threat is clearly nuclear](#). Putin has presented his bellicose rhetoric – warning last week that Russia would “make use of all weapon systems available” if needed – as a response to non-existent NATO nuclear threats.

But his officials have been startlingly clear: they want the use of nuclear weapons to be considered a real possibility and, as Putin said, “not a bluff.”

This has led to a chilling change in Washington’s messaging.

For months, Western officials waved away any suggestions that nuclear conflict was even a consideration. Now [US President Joe Biden](#) and his cabinet officials are forced to publicly send messages of deterrence and readiness to reassure their allies – and just about everyone else on Planet Earth.

It is truly discomfoting to be living in a time when the US government feels it has to publicly warn a wartime Russia – one that is losing heavily and unexpectedly against a neighbor they always thought they could subdue at will – that using nuclear weapons is a bad idea. The principles of mutual assured destruction that brought a dark calm to the Cold War seems to have lapsed.

We are faced with a Russia that wants to project a madman image ready to lose everything – for everyone – if faced with losing in this war.

Putin is far weaker now

This is a binary moment for Putin, who has no climbdown or gentle off-ramp available.

The [partial mobilization of Russian civilians](#) has been as disastrous as anyone who has observed conscription in Russia over the decades would have expected: The “wrong” people drafted, as the rich flee and the poor outnumber everyone else.

Rusty rifles, drunken busloads of recruits, and still no answer to the key question of how these tens of thousands of untrained and perhaps unwilling soldiers will get supplied and equipped on the frontline, if Moscow could not adequately outfit its regular army over the past six months?

And crisis in Putin’s Russia has not had to wait for the freshly mobilized to come back in coffins. The chaos of mobilization already has Kremlin propaganda moguls like Margarita Simonian, the head of state-controlled network RT, acting as a Twitter agony aunt for Russians whose fathers, sons or husbands have been incorrectly sent to the frontline.

They argue over-zealous local officials are to blame for conscription errors, but beneath it all, it is the war, and its appalling prosecution, that have led Russia here. The Moscow elite’s recognition of the mobilization catastrophe reeks a little of criticism of the chief himself, and that is rare.

All of this leaves Putin far weaker than when he was just losing the war. To add to his woes, he now faces internal dissent that is perhaps unprecedented. His position is dependent on strength, and he lacks that now, almost completely. The forced mobilization of ageing men and unwilling youngsters is unlikely to change the battlefield calculus, where Ukrainian morale is sky-high and their equipment slowly improving.

Do not look to Putin's inner circle for change. They are all covered in the same blood of this war, and behind the slow drumbeat of repression that has turned Russia into a dystopian autocracy over the past 22 years. Putin has no obvious successor; do not expect anyone who finally replaces him to reverse tack and sue for peace and economic recovery. Any successor may try to prove their mettle with an even more foolhardy exercise than the original invasion of Ukraine.

What next?

So we are left with a losing Putin, who cannot afford to lose. Without much conventional force left, he could turn to other tools to reverse this disastrous position.

Strategic aircraft might carpet bomb parts of Ukraine, though so many of its towns and cities look like this has already happened. He might also turn to chemical or biological weapons, although these would be too close to his own border for sanity or comfort, and would illicit an intense international response. And then there is the nuclear option – an option once so unthinkable that it seems crazy to commit to print. But that too comes with risks for Putin, beyond the likely NATO military retaliation. A military that cannot fly enough of its planes or fuel enough of its tanks has problems. It might worry that it will not be able to pull off an accurate, limited and [effective tactical nuclear strike](#).

Putin himself might worry that his fraying grip on power cannot hold together a chain of command solid enough to actually obey the order to launch a nuclear weapon. This could even be the moment where the better angels of Russian nature come to the fore. In the five years I lived there, I met a bright, warm, and sparkling people, blighted mostly by centuries of misrule.

Yet in the days ahead, it will be tempting to dismiss Moscow's broadened claims of sovereignty and saber-rattling as the dying throes of an empire that forgot to look under the hood before it went driving in a storm. This is a win or lose moment for Putin, and he does not see a future in which he loses.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Families brace for large winter heating bill
SOURCE	https://www.foxbusiness.com/lifestyle/winter-coming-families-brace-large-heating-bill-again
GIST	<p>Droves of families faced higher than average electric bills last winter due to a surge in the supply cost of the energy commodity. Unfortunately, according to some experts, this year won't be much different.</p> <p>Families already dealing with increased costs due to inflation are expected to pay even more than last year, according to a recent report from the National Energy Assistance Directors Association (NEADA).</p> <p>Earlier this month, the NEADA projected that the average cost to heat a home would increase by 17.2% since last winter, rising from \$1,025 to \$1,202. Heating oil costs will jump an estimated 54% to \$1,876, while natural gas costs may increase 24% to \$709, according to the NEADA.</p> <p>Overall, the total cost of home heating, including natural gas, electricity, heating oil and propane, is estimated to jump from \$127.9 billion to \$149.9 billion this year.</p> <p>It's going to put a squeeze on already tight family budgets, Nick Loris, C3 Solutions vice president of Public Policy, told FOX Business.</p> <p>"Whether it's through electric, natural gas or oil, prices are up across the board," Loris said. "And more money dedicated to paying for heat means fewer resources are essential for human well-being," such as food or healthcare.</p> <p>However, the impact "will be regressive, hurting the poor the most since they spend a higher percentage of their budget on energy costs," he added.</p>

Consolidated Edison Inc., which provides energy for roughly 10 million people who live in [New York City](#) and Westchester County, is already issuing tips for how consumers can save well ahead of the winter season.

"Con Edison is urging customers to take actions now that can help them manage costs this winter as market prices for electricity and natural gas are expected to be substantially higher," the company said in a recent notice.

The bill increases are driven mainly by "increases in the market cost of natural gas, which is volatile and also influences electric market costs," according to the utility company. Con Ed said local electric and gas companies and customers all across the Northeast "are facing similar circumstances."

"Whether it's through electric, natural gas or oil, prices are up across the board," Loris said. "And more money dedicated to paying for heat means fewer resources are essential for human well-being," such as food or healthcare.

However, the impact "will be regressive, hurting the poor the most since they spend a higher percentage of their budget on energy costs," he added.

Consolidated Edison Inc., which provides energy for roughly 10 million people who live in New York City and Westchester County, is already issuing tips for how consumers can save well ahead of the winter season.

"Con Edison is urging customers to take actions now that can help them manage costs this winter as market prices for electricity and natural gas are expected to be substantially higher," the company said in a recent notice.

The bill increases are driven mainly by "increases in the market cost of natural gas, which is volatile and also influences electric market costs," according to the utility company. Con Ed said local electric and gas companies and customers all across the Northeast "are facing similar circumstances."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Ian major hurricane; Florida in sights
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/hurricane-ian-tracker-florida-path-2022-09-27/
GIST	<p>Ian intensified into a major hurricane packing sustained winds of around 115 mph early Tuesday morning as it churned toward western Cuba. The storm was expected to continue strengthening as it passed over Cuba on a track for the Gulf of Mexico, with Florida's west coast in its path later this week.</p> <p>Mandatory evacuations were ordered Monday in low-lying areas surrounding Tampa Bay, and officials asked others in the area to voluntarily evacuate, knowing it could take some time to move hundreds of thousands of people out of Ian's path.</p> <p>Ian, a Category 3 storm as of Tuesday morning, was forecast to become an even stronger Category 4 with top winds of 140 mph before striking Florida as early as Wednesday. Tampa and St. Petersburg appeared to be among the most likely targets for their first direct hit by a major hurricane in a century. Even if Ian doesn't hit the area directly, it could still feel the effects of the storm, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis warned.</p> <p>"You're still looking at really significant amount of rain, you're looking at a lot of wind, you're looking at a lot of storm surge, and so, yes, follow that track, but don't think because that eye may or may not be in your area that you're not going to see impacts," DeSantis said during a Monday afternoon press conference. "You're going to see significant impacts."</p> <p>The governor said the state had suspended tolls around the Tampa Bay area and mobilized 5,000 National Guard troops, with another 2,000 on standby in neighboring states. More than 27,000 power restoration personnel were put on standby to help after the storm, DeSantis said.</p>

"Please treat this storm seriously. It's the real deal. This is not a drill," Hillsborough County Emergency Management Director Timothy Dudley said at a Monday news conference on storm preparations in Tampa, where some mandatory evacuations were ordered.

As many as 300,000 people may be evacuated from low-lying areas in Hillsborough County alone, Administrator Bonnie Wise said at a news conference. Schools and other locations were opened as shelters.

In Pinellas County, which includes St. Petersburg, officials issued evacuation orders that start taking effect Monday evening. Sheriff Bob Gualtieri said no one would be forced to leave, but they would remain at their risk.

"What it means is, we're not going to come help you. If you don't do it, you're on your own," Gualtieri said. "For all practical purposes, get out. Right now. Everybody needs to go."

The evacuation zone is all along Tampa Bay and the rivers that feed it, encompassing MacDill Air Force Base and well-known neighborhoods such as parts of Hyde Park, Davis Islands and Ybor City.

As of 2:30 a.m. Eastern on Tuesday morning, Ian was moving north-northwest at 13 mph and was located only about 35 miles south of Cuba's southwestern shores, according to the National Hurricane Center. Its maximum sustained winds had increased to 115 mph.

Authorities in Cuba were evacuating 50,000 people in Pinar del Rio province, sent in medical and emergency personnel, and took steps to protect food and other crops in warehouses, according to state media.

"Cuba is expecting extreme hurricane-force winds, also life-threatening storm surge and heavy rainfall," U.S. National Hurricane Center senior specialist Daniel Brown told The Associated Press.

The hurricane center predicted areas of Cuba's western coast could see as much as 14 feet of storm surge Monday night or early Tuesday.

In Havana, fishermen were taking their boats out of the water along the famous Malecon, the seaside boardwalk, and city workers were unclogging storm drains ahead of the expected rain.

In Havana's El Fanguito, a poor neighborhood near the Almendares River, residents were packing up what they could to leave their homes, many of which show damage from previous storms.

"I hope we escape this one because it would be the end of us. We already have so little," health worker Abel Rodrigues, 54, said.

In the Tampa Bay area, a storm surge of up to 10 feet of ocean water and 10 inches of rain, with as much as 15 inches in isolated areas. That's enough water to inundate low-lying coastal communities. Florida residents were getting ready, lining up for hours in Tampa to collect sandbags and clearing store shelves of bottled water.

Nervous anticipation led to long lines for gas, packed grocery stores and empty shelves, CBS News correspondent Omar Villafranca reports from Clearwater, Florida.

"We are going to get these sandbags in front of the garage, the garage door, the front door... and pray we're good," Gabriel Alley, who moved to Clearwater from California, told CBS News.

Ian's impending arrival also prompted NASA to haul its Artemis 1 rocket off its launch pad and back to the protection of the agency's Vehicle Assembly Building, likely ending any chance of launching the unpiloted moonshot before November.

	<p>"A lot of people on the Florida Peninsula and into the Florida Panhandle are at risk and need to be ready to take action quickly," said Rick Knabb, a hurricane specialist with The Weather Channel, "and the slow motion that we expect from Ian means we could have wind, storm surge and rain-induced flooding."</p> <p>DeSantis has declared a state of emergency throughout Florida and urged residents to prepare for the storm to lash large swaths of the state with heavy rains, high winds and rising seas.</p> <p>"We're going to keep monitoring the track of this storm. But it really is important to stress the degree of uncertainty that still exists," DeSantis said at a news conference Sunday, cautioning that "even if you're not necessarily right in the eye of the path of the storm, there's going to be pretty broad impacts throughout the state."</p> <p>Flash and urban flooding is possible in the Florida Keys and Florida Peninsula through midweek, and then heavy rainfall was possible for north Florida, the Florida Panhandle and the southeast United States later this week.</p> <p>The hurricane center has advised Floridians to have hurricane plans in place and monitor updates of the storm's evolving path.</p> <p>President Biden also declared an emergency, authorizing the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, to coordinate disaster relief and provide assistance to protect lives and property. The president postponed a scheduled Tuesday trip to Florida because of the storm.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/26 Gulf Coast region vulnerable to storm surge
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/hurricane-ian-gulf-coast-florida-vulnerable-hurricanes-storm/story?id=90529952
GIST	<p>The more than 1,200 miles of shores in the southern U.S. that line the Gulf of Mexico are no stranger to strong storms -- but that doesn't make potential damage from an approaching cyclone any less likely.</p> <p>As Hurricane Ian marches closer to the U.S., its aim toward the Gulf Coast is especially concerning considering how vulnerable the region is to storm surge, experts told ABC News.</p> <p>The underwater geology of the Gulf of Mexico is what makes the Gulf Coast particularly unguarded against the massive influx of seawater. The shallow waters in the Gulf, combined with the symmetry of its shallow ocean floor, are what allow the storm surge to be pushed even higher onto land, Ryan Truchelut, chief meteorologist at Weather Tiger, a consulting and risk management firm, told ABC News.</p> <p>The continental shelf of the Florida Gulf Coast extends quite far offshore -- up to 200 miles in some spots, Truchelut said.</p> <p>"The waters of the Gulf of Mexico just simply aren't that deep, over a lot of the Florida coastal waters just offshore," he said. "If there's wind pushing water toward that direction, it's shallow, it has nowhere to go. So it kind of amplifies and goes further inland."</p> <p>Meteorologists are most concerned about the west coast of Florida, starting in the Florida Keys and north to Tampa Bay, Michael Brennan, acting deputy director for the National Hurricane Center, told ABC News.</p> <p>The Tampa Bay area is "extremely sensitive" to storm surge, Brennan said, adding that the region could experience 5 to 8 feet of inundation -- meaning above ground-level flooding. The Fort Meyers and Charlotte Harbor areas could see 4 to 7 feet and regions farther south could see 3 to 5 feet of inundation, Brennan said.</p>

Another reason why the Gulf of Mexico is especially vulnerable to hurricanes and storm surge is because of its unique U-shaped coastline, which essentially traps a storm system into a populated region, no matter which way it turns, Truchelut said.

"When a hurricane gets into the Gulf of Mexico, it's hard for it not to hit somebody," he said.

The same geography conundrum also applies on a smaller scale to Tampa Bay, which is almost shaped like a cul-de-sac and doesn't have anywhere for the water that's getting pushed around to go, Truchelut said.

"Right now, the way this storm is coming in, you'd have this sort of push of surge right into Tampa Bay and in regions along the Gulf, western Gulf Coast," Marshall Shepherd, director of the Atmospheric Sciences Program at the University of Georgia and former president of the American Meteorological Society, told ABC News.

Although the models are still uncertain, Ian will almost certainly strike somewhere along the eastern Gulf Coast as a major hurricane, Shepherd said.

Oftentimes, if a hurricane trapped within the Gulf of Mexico changes directions, it exacerbates the threat even more, Truchelut said. The change in direction typically slows down the storm system, allowing more time for waves to get bigger and head toward the shallow continental shelf, he added. Ian will likely stall over the Tampa Bay region, Shepherd said.

Ian does not even need to directly impact the Tampa Bay region to do considerable damage, the experts said. Even without a direct hit, the slow movement at Ian's intensity will bring intense storm surge, flooding rain and prolonged hurricane-force winds.

In November 2020, Tropical Storm Eta, which had downgraded to a weak tropical storm after making landfall in Central America as a Category 4 hurricane, caused widespread flooding in Tampa. The storm made direct impact about 90 miles north of Tampa, but the 70 mph winds and soaking rain still caused bay waters to top seawalls in the area.

"It'd be 1,000 times worse had it been an actual major hurricane that was well organized," Truchelut said.

Because of the way Ian is moving, as well as its intensity and the fact that it may stall, it places the Tampa Bay region on what meteorologists call "the dirty side of the hurricane" -- the right front quadrant of the storm, just to the right of the eye, that typically has the worst of the winds and storm surge due to the motion and circulation of the system, Shepherd said.

A large concern is that many of the areas that flooded in the Tampa Bay region more than 100 years ago will do so again and at a greater scale -- and this time, populated by hundreds of thousands more people from the influx of development that has occurred since, Truchelut said. Much of the coastal infrastructure, including condos and homes along the coast, did not exist the last time a major hurricane directly impacted the region, Shepherd said.

Climate Central, a nonprofit news organization that analyzes and reports on climate science, has calculated the 100-year flood height in the Tampa Bay area at 6.5 feet. There are more than 125,000 homes in the region currently situated below that flood level.

The experts cautioned residents in Florida to heed evacuation warnings and not to be deterred by the category of the storm or "hurricane amnesia," since it has been a century since the region experienced a major storm.

"We as a society have to get accustomed to or used to planning for the worst, and maybe it doesn't happen," Shepherd said. "As good as our weather predictive capability is, if not, it still has some uncertainty with it."

Cyber, Tech Awareness

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 NKorea hackers exploit unsolicited jobs
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/09/north-koreas-lazarus-hackers-targeting.html
GIST	<p>The infamous Lazarus Group has continued its pattern of leveraging unsolicited job opportunities to deploy malware targeting Apple's macOS operating system.</p> <p>In the latest variant of the campaign observed by cybersecurity company SentinelOne last week, decoy documents advertising positions for the Singapore-based cryptocurrency exchange firm Crypto.com.</p> <p>The latest disclosure builds on previous findings from Slovak cybersecurity firm ESET in August, which delved into a similar phony job posting for the Coinbase cryptocurrency exchange platform.</p> <p>Both these fake job advertisements are just the latest in a series of attacks dubbed Operation In(ter)ception, which, in turn, is a constituent of a broader campaign tracked under the name Operation Dream Job.</p> <p>Although the exact distribution vector for the malware remains unknown, it's suspected that potential targets are singled out via direct messages on the business networking site LinkedIn.</p> <p>The intrusions commence with the deployment of a Mach-O binary, a dropper that launches the decoy PDF document containing the job listings at Crypto.com, while, in the background, it deletes the Terminal's saved state ("com.apple.Terminal.savedState").</p> <p>The downloader, also similar to the safarifontagent library employed in the Coinbase attack chain, subsequently acts as a conduit for a bare-bones second-stage bundle named "WifiAnalyticsServ.app," which is a copycat version of "FinderFontsUpdater.app."</p> <p>"The main purpose of the second-stage is to extract and execute the third-stage binary, wifianalyticsagent," SentinelOne researchers Dinesh Devadoss and Phil Stokes said. "This functions as a downloader from a [command-and-control] server."</p> <p>The final payload delivered to the compromised machine is unknown owing to the fact that the C2 server responsible for hosting the malware is currently offline.</p> <p>These attacks are not isolated, for the Lazarus Group has a history of carrying out cyber-assaults on blockchain and cryptocurrency platforms as a sanctions-evading mechanism, enabling the adversaries to gain unauthorized access to enterprise networks and steal digital funds.</p> <p>"The threat actors have made no effort to encrypt or obfuscate any of the binaries, possibly indicating short-term campaigns and/or little fear of detection by their targets," the researchers said.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 Study: firms face 51 incidents each day
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/global-firms-51-security-incidents/
GIST	<p>Security operations (SecOps) teams are struggling to respond to dozens of cybersecurity incidents every single day, according to a new report from Trellix.</p> <p>The security vendor polled 9000 security decision makers from organizations with 500+ employees across 15 markets to compile its latest study, <i>XDR: Redefining the future of cybersecurity</i>.</p>

[It found](#) that the average SecOps team has to manage 51 incidents per day, with 36% of respondents claiming they deal with 50 to 200 daily incidents. Around half (46%) agreed that they are “inundated by a never-ending stream of cyber-attacks.”

Part of the problem is the siloed nature of security and detection and response systems, the study claimed. Some 60% of respondents argued that poorly integrated products mean teams can’t work efficiently, while a third (34%) admitted they have blind spots.

It’s perhaps no surprise, therefore, that 60% admitted they can’t keep pace with the rapid evolution of security threats.

This could be having a major impact on the bottom line. The vast majority (84%) of security decision makers Trellix spoke to estimated that their organization lost up to 10% of revenue from security breaches in the past year.

Medium size businesses (\$50–\$100m in revenue) lost an average of 8% in revenue, versus 5% for large businesses with a turnover of \$10bn–\$25bn. That could mean hundreds of millions of dollars are being thrown away each year due to inadequate SecOps.

Separate studies have highlighted the physical and mental toll this can take on SecOps analysts.

A [Trend Micro report](#) from last year claimed that 70% of first responders feel so stressed outside of work that they are unable to switch off or relax, and are irritable with friends and family.

Worse still, this pressure is leading to poor outcomes for threat detection and response.

In the SOC or IT security department, [many respondents admitted](#) turning off alerts (43%), walking away from their computer (43%), hoping another team member will step in (50%) or ignoring alerts entirely (40%).

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/26 PowerPoint ‘mouseover’ malware delivery
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/hackers-use-powerpoint-files-for-mouseover-malware-delivery/
GIST	<p>Hackers believed to work for Russia have started using a new code execution technique that relies on mouse movement in Microsoft PowerPoint presentations to trigger a malicious PowerShell script.</p> <p>No malicious macro is necessary for the malicious code to execute and download the payload, for a more insidious attack.</p> <p>A report from threat intelligence company Cluster25 says that APT28 (a.k.a. ‘Fancy Bear’), a threat group attributed to the Russian GRU (Main Intelligence Directorate of the Russian General Staff), have used the new technique to deliver the Graphite malware as recently as September 9.</p> <p>The threat actor lures targets with a PowerPoint (.PPT) file allegedly linked to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), an intergovernmental organization working towards stimulating economic progress and trade worldwide.</p> <p>Inside the PPT file there are two slides, both featuring instructions in English and French for using the Interpretation option in Zoom video-conferencing app.</p> <p>The PPT file contains a hyperlink that acts as a trigger for launching a malicious PowerShell script using the <i>SyncAppvPublishingServer</i> utility. This technique has been documented since June 2017. Multiple researchers explained at the time how the infection works without a malicious macro nested inside an Office document (1, 2, 3, 4).</p>

Based on the metadata found, [Cluster25 says](#) that the hackers have been preparing the campaign between January and February, although the URLs used in the attacks appeared active in August and September.

The researchers say that the threat actor targets entities in the defense and government sectors of countries in the European Union and Eastern Europe and believe that the espionage campaign is ongoing.

Infection chain

When opening the lure document in presentation mode and the victim hovers the mouse over a hyperlink, a malicious PowerShell script is activated to download a JPEG file ("DSC0002.jpeg") from a Microsoft OneDrive account.

The JPEG is an encrypted DLL file (*lmapi2.dll*), that is decrypted and dropped in the 'C:\ProgramData\' directory, later executed via *rundll32.exe*. A registry key for persistence is also created for the DLL.

Next, *lmapi2.dll* fetches and decrypts a second JPEG file and loads it into memory, on a new thread previously created by the DLL.

Cluster25 details that each of the strings in the newly fetched file requires a different XOR key for deobfuscation. The resulting payload is Graphite malware in portable executable (PE) form.

Graphite abuses the Microsoft Graph API and OneDrive to communicate with the command and control (C2) server. The threat actor accesses the service by using a fixed client ID to obtain a valid OAuth2 token.

With the new OAuth2 token, Graphite queries the Microsoft Graph APIs for new commands by enumerating the child files in the check OneDrive subdirectory, the researchers explain.

"If a new file is found, the content is downloaded and decrypted through an AES-256-CBC decryption algorithm," Cluster25 says, adding that "the malware allows remote command execution by allocating a new region of memory and executing the received shellcode by calling a new dedicated thread."

Graphite malware's purpose is to allow the attacker to load other malware into system memory. It has been [documented back in January](#) by researchers at Trellix, a [merger](#) of McAfee Enterprise and FireEye, who named it so specifically because it leverages the Microsoft Graph API to use OneDrive as C2.

The campaign that Trellix investigated used an Excel documents titled "parliament_rew.xlsx" and "Missions Budget.xlsx" that appeared to target government employees and individuals in the defense industry.

Based on code similarities with malware samples from 2018, targeting, and the infrastructure used in the attacks, Trellix has attributed Graphite to APT28 with low to moderate confidence.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/26 New Erbium password stealing malware
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/new-erbium-password-stealing-malware-spreads-as-game-cracks-cheats/
GIST	<p>The new 'Erbium' information-stealing malware is being distributed as fake cracks and cheats for popular video games to steal victims' credentials and cryptocurrency wallets.</p> <p>Erbium is a new Malware-as-a-Service (MaaS) that provides subscribers with a new information-stealing malware that is gaining popularity in the cybercrime community thanks to its extensive functionality, customer support, and competitive pricing.</p> <p>Researchers at Cluster25's team were the first to report on Erbium earlier this month, but a new report by Cyfirma shares further information on how the password-stealing trojan is distributed.</p>

New Malware-as-a-Service operation

Erbium has been promoted on Russian-speaking forums since July 2022, but its actual deployment in the wild has been uncertain thus far.

Erbium initially cost \$9 per week, but since its popularity rose in late August, the price went up to \$100 per month or \$1000 for a full-year license.

Compared to the "defacto" choice in the field, RedLine stealer, Erbium's cost is roughly one-third, so it's aiming to disrupt the market for malware commonly used by threat actors.

Like other information-stealing malware, Erbium will steal data stored in web browsers (Chromium or Gecko-based), such as passwords, cookies, credit cards, and autofill information.

The malware also attempts to exfiltrate data from a large set of cryptocurrency wallets installed on web browsers as extensions.

Cold desktop wallets like Exodus, Atomic, Armory, Bitcoin-Core, Bytecoin, Dash-Core, Electrum, Electron, Coinomi, Ethereum, Litecoin-Core, Monero-Core, Zcash, and Jaxx are also stolen.

Erbium also steals two-factor authentication codes from Trezor Password Manager, EOS Authenticator, Authy 2FA, and Authenticator 2FA.

The malware can grab screenshots from all monitors, snatch Steam and Discord tokens, steal Telegram auth files, and profile the host based on the OS and hardware.

The malware uses three URLs for connecting to the panel, including Discord's Content Delivery Network (CDN), a platform that malware operators have heavily abused.

While Erbium is still a work in progress, users on hacker forums have praised the author's efforts and willingness to listen to client requests.

Cluster25 reported signs of Erbium infections worldwide, including in the USA, France, Colombia, Spain, Italy, India, Vietnam, and Malaysia.

While the first Erbium campaign uses game cracks as lures, the distribution channels could diversify significantly anytime, as buyers of the malware may choose to push it via different methods.

To keep the threat out of your system, avoid downloading pirated software, scan all downloaded files on an AV tool, and keep your software up to date by installing the latest available security patches.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/26 Russia planning cyberattacks energy grid
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/russia-planning-cyberattacks-ukraine-energy-sector
GIST	<p>As protests against military conscription rage inside Russia, the country is planning to continue its offensive into Ukraine with cyberattacks on critical infrastructure.</p> <p>The Odessa Journal reported Ukrainian military intelligence has learned the first cyberattacks will soon be launched against the Ukrainian energy sector, informed by previous Russian cyberattacks on the country's electricity infrastructure in 2015 and 2016. After energy supply operations are crippled by cyberattacks, the Russian military plans to ramp up missile strikes on those facilities to shut down the electrical service throughout the war-battered country.</p> <p>"The occupying command is convinced that this will slow down the offensive actions of the Ukrainian Defense Forces," the Odessa Journal added.</p>

Additional cyberattacks are being planned against Ukrainian allies Poland and the Baltic states, according to the report.

Russian Tactical Shift?

With increasing pressure to show military gains, [Russian cyber threats](#) are a potentially effective way to ramp up offensive measures without drawing military retaliation, according to John Hultquist, vice president of intelligence analysis at Mandiant said in response to the reports of anticipated cyberattacks.

He added in the months since the occupation of Ukraine began, Russia hasn't been launching cyberattacks outside of Ukraine, indicating a potential shift in focus on cyberwarfare by the Kremlin.

"Many of the disruptive and destructive cyberattacks we have seen thus far have been disrupted, isolated, or largely limited to Ukraine, where there is intense focus," Hultquist said. "With a few exceptions we have not seen the scaled, serious attacks we expected even before the war began."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/26 Chinese espionage hackers target Tibetans
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/09/chinese-espionage-hackers-target.html?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>A China-aligned advanced persistent threat actor known as TA413 weaponized recently disclosed flaws in Sophos Firewall and Microsoft Office to deploy a never-before-seen backdoor called LOWZERO as part of an espionage campaign aimed at Tibetan entities.</p> <p>Targets primarily consisted of organizations associated with the Tibetan community, including enterprises associated with the Tibetan government-in-exile.</p> <p>The intrusions involved the exploitation of CVE-2022-1040 and CVE-2022-30190 (aka "Follina"), two remote code execution vulnerabilities in Sophos Firewall and Microsoft Office, respectively.</p> <p>"This willingness to rapidly incorporate new techniques and methods of initial access contrasts with the group's continued use of well known and reported capabilities, such as the Royal Road RTF weaponizer, and often lax infrastructure procurement tendencies," Recorded Future said in a new technical analysis.</p> <p>TA413, also known as LuckyCat, has been linked to relentlessly targeting organizations and individuals associated with the Tibetan community at least since 2020 using malware such as ExileRAT, Sepulcher, and a malicious Mozilla Firefox browser extension dubbed FriarFox.</p> <p>The group's exploitation of the Follina flaw was previously highlighted by Proofpoint in June 2022, although the ultimate end goal of the infection chains remained unclear.</p> <p>Also put to use in a spear-phishing attack identified in May 2022 was a malicious RTF document that exploited flaws in Microsoft Equation Editor to drop the custom LOWZERO implant. This was achieved by employing a Royal Road RTF weaponizer tool, which is widely shared among Chinese threat actors.</p> <p>In another phishing email sent to a Tibetan target in late May, a Microsoft Word attachment hosted on the Google Firebase service attempted to leverage the Follina vulnerability to execute a PowerShell command designed to download the backdoor from a remote server.</p> <p>LOWZERO, the backdoor, is capable of receiving additional modules from its command-and-control (C2) server, but only on the condition that the compromised machine is deemed to be of interest to the threat actor.</p> <p>"The group continues to incorporate new capabilities while also relying on tried-and-tested [tactics, techniques, and procedures]," the cybersecurity firm said.</p>

	"TA413's adoption of both zero-day and recently published vulnerabilities is indicative of wider trends with Chinese cyber-espionage groups whereby exploits regularly appear in use by multiple distinct Chinese activity groups prior to their widespread public availability."
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/26 Hackers leak French hospital patients data
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/hackers-leak-french-hospital-patient-data-ransom-fight?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Hackers who crippled a French hospital and stole a trove of data last month have released personal records of patients online, officials have confirmed.</p> <p>The cyberattackers demanded a multimillion dollar ransom from the Corbeil-Essonnes hospital near Paris a month ago, but the institution refused to pay.</p> <p>The hospital said the hackers had now dumped medical scans and lab analyses along with the national security numbers of patients.</p> <p>"I condemn in the strongest possible terms the unspeakable disclosure of hacked data," health minister Francois Braun tweeted on Sunday.</p> <p>Hospitals around the world have been facing increasing attacks from ransomware groups, particularly since the pandemic stretched resources to breaking point.</p> <p>The problem has been acute in France, where officials estimated early last year that healthcare institutions were facing on average an attack every week.</p> <p>President Emmanuel Macron last year called the attacks during the pandemic a "crisis within a crisis" and announced an extra one billion euros for cybersecurity.</p> <p>During last month's attack, the Corbeil-Essonnes hospital shut down its emergency services and sent many patients to other institutions.</p> <p>At one point, officials said the only technology still working was the telephone.</p> <p>Rather than selling the trove of data, the hacker has dumped at least some of it for download on the "dark web" -- a hidden part of the internet that requires special software to access.</p> <p>Analysts said it seemed to be a tactic to put pressure on the hospital, even though public institutions are banned by French law from paying ransoms.</p> <p>Cybersecurity researcher Damien Bancal, who revealed the leak and has seen the files, told AFP the worry is that other criminals will now launch scams with the data that has already been divulged.</p> <p>In response to the leak on the weekend, the hospital severely restricted access to its systems and told patients to be extremely vigilant when receiving emails, text messages or phone calls.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/26 Bot network fake porn to fool Facebook
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/facebook-bots-ddos-attack/
GIST	IN NOVEMBER 2021, Tord Lundström, the technical director at Swedish digital forensics nonprofit Qurium Media, noticed something strange. A massive distributed denial of service (DDoS) attack was targeting Bulatlat, an alternative Phillippine media outlet hosted by the nonprofit. And it was coming from Facebook users.

Lundström and his team found that the attack was just the start of it. Bulatlat had become the target of a sophisticated Vietnamese troll farm that had captured the credentials of thousands of Facebook accounts and turned them into malicious bots to target the credentials of yet more accounts to swell its numbers.

The volume of this attack was staggering even for Bulatlat, which has long been the target of censorship and major cyberattacks. The team at Qurium was blocking up to 60,000 IP addresses a day from accessing Bulatlat's website. "We didn't know where it was coming from, why people were going to these specific parts of the Bulatlat website," says Lundström.

When they traced the attack, things got weirder still. Lundström and his team found that requests for pages on Bulatlat's website were actually coming from Facebook links disguised to look like links to pornography. These scam links captured the credentials of the Facebook users and redirected the traffic to Bulatlat, essentially executing a phishing attack and a DDoS attack at the same time. From there, the compromised accounts were automated to spam their networks with more of the same fake porn links, which in turn sent more and more users careering toward Bulatlat's website.

Though Facebook parent company Meta has systems in place to detect phishing scams and problematic links, Qurium found that the attackers were using a "bouncing domain." This meant that if Meta's detection system were to test the domain, it would link out to a legitimate website, but if a regular user clicked on the link, they would be redirected to the phishing site.

After months of investigation, Qurium was able to identify a Vietnamese company called Mac Quan Inc. that had registered some of the domain names for the phishing sites. Qurium estimates that the Vietnamese group had captured the credentials of upwards of 500,000 Facebook users from more than 30 countries using some 100 different domain names. It's thought that over 1 million accounts have been targeted by the bot network.

To further circumvent Meta's detection systems, the attackers used "residential proxies," routing traffic through an intermediary based in the same country as the stolen Facebook account—normally a local cell phone—to make it appear as though the login was coming from a local IP address. "Anyone from anywhere in the world can then access these accounts and use them for whatever they want," says Lundström.

A Facebook page for "Mac Quan IT" states that its owner is an engineer at the domain company Namecheap.com and includes a post from May 30, 2021, where it advertised likes and followers for sale: 10,000 yen (\$70) for 350 likes and 20,000 yen for 1,000 followers. WIRED contacted the email attached to the Facebook page for comment but did not receive a response. Qurium further traced the domain name to an email registered to a person called Mien Trung Vinh.

"We emailed Facebook and thought, 'Of course they're going to do something about it,'" says Lundström. Qurium contacted Meta three times between March 31 and May 11 but did not receive a response. All the while, Bulatlat continued to receive attacks from the bot network. "These are criminals that are building fake services within the same platform that is actually supposed to stop them," Lundström says. "This would be equivalent to selling drugs in the police station."

David Agranovich, director of threat disruption at Meta, says that Meta urges people to "be cautious when they're asked to share their social media credentials with websites they don't know and trust." Agranovich adds that Meta continues "to improve how we detect and enforce in response to attempts to change tactics by these adversarial phishing campaigns." Facebook removed the Facebook page for Mac Quan IT after WIRED shared the details.

Ari Lightman, professor of digital media and marketing at Carnegie Mellon University, says tactics like those used by Mac Quan are "much more common than we know." Lightman says the emphasis on personal connections—and the trust that comes with them—can make people more likely to click on dodgy links and inadvertently hand over private information.

HEADLINE	09/27 Ukraine's internet army 'NAFO Fellas'
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraines-internet-army-of-nafo-fellas-fights-russian-trolls-and-rewards-donors-with-dogs-11664271002?mod=hp_lead_pos11
GIST	<p>Ukraine has received more than 1 million tons of military equipment from NATO countries, including tanks, howitzers and ammunition. It has also received tons of support from NAFO in the form of sarcasm, ridicule and fundraising.</p> <p>NAFO—the North Atlantic Fella Organization—has no relationship with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, other than playing on its name. It is an ad hoc collection of cybernauts, amateur artists and donors. They post on social media to back Ukraine and channel contributions to causes that buy equipment for soldiers, like the Georgian Legion of volunteers, or support humanitarian-aid campaigns like the Saint Javelin website.</p> <p>The effort has probably encouraged more than \$1 million in donations, estimates one of the founders of the fellas.</p> <p>There is no command structure. Participants flood social-media platforms to mock Russia and its supporters while cheering for Ukraine, frequently turning pro-Russian commentary on its head. Images are often rough collages involving dogs clad in military gear or other clothing, superimposed onto war photos. Commentary is flecked with Russian words like “vatnik,” a pejorative for Kremlin fanatic, and co-opts poor English from Russia supporters’ posts, like the phrase “What air defense doing?”</p> <p>Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov and Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas are NAFO fellas. Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis recently toured the Ukrainian port city of Odessa in a “NAFO FAN” T-shirt under his sport jacket. Trevor Reed, a former U.S. Marine who was imprisoned in Russia for almost three years, wore a similar shirt in an interview on MSNBC.</p> <p>Russia has for years sought to influence public discourse in open societies though the internet. Western intelligence agencies have accused Moscow’s troll forces, including the Internet Research Agency, of having links to the Kremlin and trying to sway elections and foment controversy. But those posts are often stiff and humorless. NAFO is intentionally absurdist.</p> <p>“It is really a way of calling out the insanity of Putin’s propaganda,” said Rep. Adam Kinzinger (R, Ill.), a self-declared fella. “It is great to see effective pushback.”</p> <p>A NATO official said that the two organizations have no connection, but “we share the goal of supporting Ukraine and calling out Russian disinformation.” Such grass-roots communities “show the strength of free, democratic and diverse societies,” the official said.</p> <p>NAFO emerged in the spring from social-media discussions among Ukraine’s supporters and from arguments with pro-Russian posters. A Twitter exchange in June with a Russian ambassador became a rallying point for Ukrainian partisans. Ukraine’s supporters took one of the Russian diplomat’s tweets in the thread—“You pronounced this nonsense. Not me.”—and made it a motto that now appears on T-shirts. “A lot of it is spur-of-the-moment and things just click,” said one of NAFO’s founding members, a Pole who posts under the name Kama.</p> <p>Looking for a new Twitter avatar early this year, Kama picked a furry Shiba Inu dog and edited Polish military togs onto the photo. The iconography clicked and soon Shiba Inus and other dogs—in all kinds of attire—were being cropped into anti-Russian imagery across the internet.</p> <p>Around the same time, Kama addressed a fellow online Ukraine supporter as a fella. That spawned a chat about the friendly moniker, Kama said, from which emerged a mashup with NATO. Around the name and the mascot, a groundswell grew.</p>

“It is the most organic movement I’ve been involved with,” said another NAFO founder, an American who posts as Pete.

For Kama and other fellas in parts of Europe once dominated by the Soviet Union, NAFO channels a Cold War tradition of mockery that for many people was the sole form of defense against repression.

“In Soviet time, the voices opposing the regime were underground,” said Mr. Landsbergis of Lithuania, which was the first Soviet republic to break free in 1990. “The beauty of all the current anti-Putin, antiregime efforts are that they are public, loud [and] visible.”

NAFO fellas make jokes out of Kremlin conspiracy theories. Many list their social-media profile location as Langley, Va.—homebase of the Central Intelligence Agency—to poke fun at frequent Russian allegations of CIA plots. The Twitter profile of Mr. Reed, the ex-Marine, says, “Not making \$10k for Psyops”—military shorthand for psychological operations—with a wink emoji.

“You can’t fight with somebody you can’t reason with, so we won’t fight with them—we just ridicule them,” said Kama. “I like the idea that people like the Russian ambassador see a dog and still engage.”

More materially, the fellas support [Ukraine’s war effort](#) via Saint Javelin and a limited number of other causes. Saint Javelin is named in honor of the American shoulder-fired antitank weapons that helped defend Kyiv from Russia’s attack early this year. The site sells merchandise—including mock Slavic icons of a saintly woman holding a Javelin and NAFO gear—to raise money for humanitarian help to Ukraine.

Donors to NAFO-linked causes can post screenshots of their payments and request personalized avatars. NAFO now has more than 80 artist volunteers, dubbed forgers in an ironic allusion to working in the forge of a steel plant. Forgers receive about 50 requests for avatars from donors daily, said Pete, and as many as 10,000 have been created so far.

Behind each one is a donation or purchase of pro-Ukrainian merchandise, likely totaling over \$1 million, Pete said, but no official tally is kept.

Rep. Kinzinger, a former Air Force pilot, received a dog wearing aviator gear in a toy fighter plane on wheels.

“I think it’s pretty awesome,” said Rep. Kinzinger, who didn’t understand the dog-for-donation equation until after he had declared support for NAFO on Twitter. He said he has only chatted a bit with other members of Congress about the movement.

“It is hard to explain until you see it in action—until you see, Hey, we’re a bunch of furry dogs that push back against disinformation,” he said.

Mr. Reed, who was released from Russian captivity in April through a prisoner exchange orchestrated by the White House, has a dog in Marine camouflage, carrying a military assault rifle.

“Oh, man—this something I definitely want to get involved with,” he recalled thinking when he stumbled on NAFO earlier this month. “I’m just glad to be part of anything that is undermining the bear,” he said in reference to Russia’s national symbol.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/26 Australia police probe hacker’s demand
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/australian-police-probe-purported-hackers-ransom-demand-90552488
GIST	CANBERRA, Australia -- Australian police were investigating a purported hacker’s release of the stolen personal data of 10,000 Optus customers and demand for a \$1 million ransom in cryptocurrency, the telecommunications company’s chief executive said Tuesday.

The Australian government has blamed lax cybersecurity at the nation's second-largest wireless carrier for the unprecedented breach last week of the personal data of 9.8 million current and former Optus customers.

Jeremy Kirk, a Sydney-based cybersecurity writer, said the purported hacker, who uses the online name Optusdata, had released 10,000 Optus customer records on the dark web and threatened to release another 10,000 every day for the next four days unless Optus paid the ransom.

Asked if the hacker had threatened to sell the remaining data if Optus did not pay the \$1 million within a week, the company's chief executive Kelly Bayer Rosmarin told Australian Broadcasting Corp.: "We have seen there is a post like that on the dark web."

Australian Federal Police said Monday their investigators were working with overseas agencies, including the FBI, to determine who was behind the attack and to help shield the public from identity fraud. Police declined further comment Tuesday as the investigations were ongoing.

"They're looking into every possibility and they're using the time available to see if they can track down that particular criminal and verify if they are bona fide," Bayer Rosmarin said.

Kirk wrote in his website Bank Info Security that Optusdata later deleted the post along with three samples of the stolen data.

Optusdata sent Kirk a link to the new post that withdrew the ransom demand, claimed the stolen data had been deleted and apologized to Optus as well as its customers.

"Too many eyes. We will not sale (sic) data to anyone," the post said, adding that Optus had not paid a ransom.

Kirk said he asked why Optusdata had changed their mind but received no response.

Australian Information and Privacy Commissioner Angelene Falk, the national data protection authority, said the latest post "indicates ... this is a very fast-moving incident."

"It's a major incident of significant concern for the community. What we need to focus on here is ensuring that all steps are maintained to protect the community's personal information from further risk of harm," Falk said.

Earlier Tuesday, Kirk said the released personal data appeared to include health care numbers, a form of identification not previously revealed publicly to have been hacked.

Cybersecurity Minister Clare O'Neil urged Optus to give priority to informing customers of what information had been taken.

"I am incredibly concerned this morning about reports that personal information from the Optus data breach, including Medicare numbers, are now being offered for free and for ransom," O'Neil said. "Medicare numbers were never advised to form part of compromised information from the breach," she added.

O'Neil on Monday described the hack as an "unprecedented theft of consumer information in Australian history."

Of the 9.8 million people affected, 2.8 million had "significant amounts of personal data," including driver's licenses and passport numbers, breached and are at significant risk of identity theft and fraud, she said.

Kirk said he used an online forum for criminals who trade in stolen data to ask Optusdata how the Optus information was accessed.

Optus appeared to have left an application programming interface, a piece of software known as an API that allows other systems to communicate and exchange data, open to the public, Kirk said.

“It looks like it was a failure to secure the software system, so anybody on the internet could find it,” Kirk said.

The Australian Financial Review said the theory that Optus “left open an API” had been widely reported.

Bayer Rosmarin rejected such explanations.

“Given we’re not allowed to say much because the police have asked us not to, what I can say -- that hopefully will help people understand that it’s not as being portrayed — is that our data was encrypted and we have multiple layers of protection,” Bayer Rosmarin said.

“So it is not the case of having some sort of completely exposed API sitting out there,” she added.

O’Neil didn’t detail how the breach occurred, but described it as a “quite a basic hack.”

Optus had “effectively left the window open for data of this nature to be stolen,” O’Neil said.

Australia’s government is considering tougher cybersecurity rules for telecommunications companies as a result of the hack.

Current cyberprotection law doesn’t allow for Optus to be fined for the breach, though O’Neil noted fines of hundreds of millions of dollars would be possible if it had occurred in other countries.

O’Neil said a potential 2 million Australian dollar (\$1.3 million) fine under privacy law was inadequate.

[Return to Top](#)

Terrorism, Extremism

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Afghanistan money, economy crumbles
SOURCE	https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2022-09-27/afghanistan-money-bills-falling-apart-economic-crisis
GIST	<p>KABUL — Remember cash? These days, when a wand-like wave of a phone or credit card gets you a cup of coffee or more, it’s easy to forget what actual bills look like — and the abuse they receive in an average five-year life span.</p> <p>Not for Allah Mohammad Araya. In a country so sanctioned that much of its own cash is out of reach, he sat cross-legged in a corner of Kabul’s main foreign-exchange market, sifting through a pile of what looked like paper trash but was actually a disaster area of distressed afghanis, Afghanistan’s currency.</p> <p>“Out of every 10,000 afghani bills here, maybe 1,000 of those bills are still OK to use,” he said, pointing to a 100-afghani note faded to the point that one side seemed plain. Another looked more Scotch tape than bill. A third wasn’t much better, the victim of a bad cut-and-paste job that left its color scheme — and serial numbers — mismatched.</p> <p>“That one even the central bank won’t take,” he said, shaking his head before putting it up to the sun for a closer look.</p> <p>A year after the Taliban careered into power, Afghanistan’s economy remains in crisis. The slashing of international aid gouged 45% out of the country’s GDP, and the World Bank and the International</p>

Monetary Fund expect economic output to contract by a further one-third by the end of 2022. Half of the country's 39 million people need humanitarian assistance, according to the United Nations.

Making matters worse, wide-ranging Western sanctions and Washington's [freeze of \\$7 billion in Afghan central bank assets](#) deposited in the Federal Reserve Bank in New York mean that credit card and online payments are out. That has turned Afghanistan into a cash-only economy not only at a time when capital controls limit how much money you can withdraw from the bank but also when no new bills are entering into circulation to replace worn-out ones.

In previous years, the Afghan central bank — known as Da Afghanistan Bank, or DAB — would withdraw annually 3 billion to 4 billion afghanis' worth (about \$33 million to \$45 million) of decrepit banknotes and substitute them with new ones printed abroad. (Afghanistan does not have its own mint.) But the international sanctions on working with the Taliban have left foreign printers spooked, plunging the country into a liquidity crisis as Afghans contend with a currency that is — literally — falling apart.

"The condition of these bills, it's terrible, and it's getting worse by the day," said Amin Jan Khosti, a veteran member of the money-changers union and chief of the foreign-exchange market, the Sarai Shahzadeh. "People try to iron them, they play with serial numbers. We've told DAB, and we know they're trying to find solutions."

In January 2020, the then-Republic of Afghanistan had contracted the state-owned Polish Security Printing Works, or PWPW, to print 380 million banknotes equaling 10 billion afghanis for a contract worth more than \$4 million. By the time of the Taliban takeover, PWPW had fulfilled 70% of the contract, said Shah Mohammad Mehrabi, a Washington-based member of the Afghan central bank's governing board who was appointed by the previous government but continues serving under the Taliban.

"The last tranche was supposed to be delivered last September. But it was suspended when the interim Taliban administration came into power and sanctions were imposed," Mehrabi said.

Talks between DAB and the U.S. State and Treasury departments resulted in assurances to the PWPW that it wouldn't run afoul of proscriptions. "But then we had logistical problems," Mehrabi said. "Who would deliver these afghanis to the central bank?"

Even Qatar, which has [facilitated the Taliban's diplomatic efforts](#), balked at doing that without Western assurances. According to Mehrabi, the Treasury Department stated that "clearance has been granted to all entities," but an agreement between Qatar and DAB didn't materialize.

And there was yet another issue: DAB had no intermediary through which it could send payments, including to PWPW.

"Whenever DAB tried to make payment to PWPW through another intermediary, the payment was rejected," Mehrabi said, adding that a new contract with the French company Oberthur Fiduciaire for 390 million banknotes, negotiated by the previous Afghan government, has yet to be signed.

The consequences of the bill shortage are compounded by the overall increase in prices, which have risen in part because of the [ripple effects of the war in Ukraine](#), said Philippe Kropf, head of communications for the United Nations' World Food Program in Afghanistan.

People need more cash to pay for basic goods, but the amount of available hard currency is shrinking.

"We're injecting \$55.8 million every month in cash to beneficiaries, commercial transporters, food suppliers and salaries," he said. "But money physically failing exacerbates problems with cash-based transfer. Now we tell our beneficiaries to examine the money they're receiving and make sure it's OK."

You can almost see the currency degrade in real time at the Sarai Shahzadeh marketplace, a grime-encrusted, ramshackle building that on occasion gets choked with the miasma of sewage from the nearby Darya-e-Kabul river.

Inside are labyrinthine passageways with hundreds of foreign-exchange offices and swarms of currency brokers. Many gather on the rooftop, which functions as an open-air currency auction site and includes a cafeteria serving French fries and egg sandwiches, not far from where Araya, the trader who was sifting through old notes, sat on his rug under an umbrella.

He flipped idly through a bunch of 100-afghani notes — each worth about \$1.13 — before settling on a particularly sorry example. He bent close to examine its production date.

“These are supposed to last roughly three years,” he said, a rueful smile on his face. “This one has been around for 14.”

On the other side of the rooftop was Qudratullah Mohammadi, a kind-faced man ensconced behind nine rubber-band-bound stacks of ragged afghanis.

“Tens, 20s, 50s, 100s — they’re the worst,” he said, gesturing toward his reject pile. “I argue with people, I fight with them, but most won’t accept these bills” when they try to convert foreign currency into afghanis.

“I’m saving them for the day the central bank will take them,” Mohammadi said.

The aversion to lower-denomination bills affects transactions in the other direction as well, said Faiz Zaland, a professor of political science at Kabul University. Currency traders impose a penalty on customers exchanging lower-denomination afghanis for foreign cash because the central bank refuses to accept them.

“You’ll get one rate if you give them 1,000- and 500-afghani notes, but with 10s and 50s you have to pay more,” Zaland said.

Some have tried to circumvent the banking system entirely [by using cryptocurrencies](#), which had a surge in popularity after the Taliban takeover. A report by data firm Chainalysis saw Afghanistan vault to 20th out of 154 countries in crypto adoption; a year earlier it hadn’t even warranted a ranking.

Turning that into money in hand is a convoluted process. One method has been to use bitcoin to purchase Universal Cash, one of the currencies used in the massively popular online game PlayerUnknown’s Battlegrounds, or PUBG. That can then be sold on to a number of exchange houses for hard cash.

But the Taliban recently imposed a nationwide ban on digital currency trading. In August, local media reported that authorities shut down 16 cryptocurrency exchange houses in the western province of Herat.

“When the price of bitcoin more than halved, the [government] decided to stop it all. They shut down some people here,” said Mohammad Mansour, a currency trader with an office in a side warren of the Sarai Shahzadeh.

Others believe the Taliban’s moves indicate it’s in no hurry to resolve the liquidity crisis.

“The incentive to not having enough money in the market is that your exchange rate stays high against the U.S. dollar,” Zaland said. It took 77 afghanis to buy \$1 in early 2021, but now it takes about 88 — a smaller depreciation of the afghani than expected.

In any case, talks are largely frozen for now: Following a U.S. drone strike on a house in Kabul that [killed Al Qaeda leader Ayman Zawahiri](#) in July, Washington paused discussions with DAB, Mehrabi said.

	<p>This month, the State and Treasury departments issued a joint statement announcing the establishment of the Switzerland-based Afghan Fund, which “will protect, preserve, and make targeted disbursements” of half of the frozen reserves, using the \$3.5 billion to stabilize the Afghan economy while keeping the money “out of the hands of the Taliban and other malign actors.”</p> <p>The statement said that, to rebuild confidence internationally, DAB needs to show it is free from political interference, has “appropriate” anti-money-laundering and terrorism-financing controls and submits to third-party assessment and monitors.</p> <p>It all adds up to a major headache for Abdul Qaher Faqiri, a Kabul-based businessman with projects involving importing goods and mining. Leaning back in his chair, he took a worn-out 20-afghani note from his wallet.</p> <p>“Afghanistan is like our money,” he said, turning the bill over to examine the multitude of tears and the discoloration from years of use. “It’s all a big, big problem.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/26 US frees Taliban drug trafficker on ‘kill’ list
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/biden-white-house-us/2022/09/26/id/1089131/
GIST	<p>The Biden administration executed a prisoner swap last week that brought Mark Frerichs home to the United States after being held captive in Afghanistan for more than two years.</p> <p>In return for Frerichs' release, U.S. officials allowed Haji Bashir Noorzai — a prominent member of the Taliban, who had been in an American prison for 17 years on drug-trafficking charges — to be granted clemency.</p> <p>The same Noorzai who reportedly belonged to a prominent U.S. agency's special ops "kill" list in a classified setting.</p> <p>A U.S. Navy veteran who had spent more than a decade in Afghanistan as a civilian contractor, Frerichs was abducted in January 2020, possibly within the Taliban-linked Haqqani network.</p> <p>Frerichs' release comes five months after the Biden administration negotiated terms to bring home U.S. Marine veteran Trevor Reed.</p> <p>However, WNBA star Brittney Griner and corporate security executive Paul Whelan are still being held by Russian authorities, and there no indications that a prisoner swap involving Griner and/or Whelan is imminent — even though Griner's arrest, court hearings, and subsequent guilty plea have garnered much attention in American media.</p> <p>Griner has already been sentenced to a nine-year prison term in Russia.</p> <p>According to Fox News, negotiations involving the potential release of Noorzai began in June, when President Joe Biden granted relief from the Taliban drug lord's life sentence, paving the way for a "very narrow window of opportunity" to complete the deal, according to a U.S. official.</p> <p>Noorzai had been a "high-priority target" on the U.S. special operations forces' highly classified kill-or-capture list, after reportedly pouring millions of drug dollars into the Taliban treasury, according to Military.com.</p> <p>Michael Braun, chief operations for the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, reportedly oversaw the complex sting which lured Noorzai to his arrest in New York City in April 2005.</p> <p>Braun's team reportedly featured a group of agents from the DEA's Special Operations Division, who focused on "narcoterrorists" that used drug money to finance terrorism.</p>

	<p>"Hundreds of millions of dollars generated by the Noorzai heroin trafficking enterprise went straight into the war chests of the Taliban and most assuredly funded attacks against our military forces and those of our allies in Afghanistan and the region," said Braun, according to Military.com.</p> <p>"The lives of U.S. military and coalition partners were placed at great risk while executing several highly dangerous operations to hunt him down," added Braun.</p> <p>At the time of his 2005 arrest, Noorzai seemingly didn't possess the profile for a future candidate for presidential clemency.</p> <p>According to Fox News, Noorzai was on a list of the world's most prolific drug traffickers, and was prosecuted in Manhattan's federal court on charges of owning opium fields in Kandahar province (Afghanistan) and relying on a network of distributors who sold the heroin in New York.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/26 Militant Islamist violence in the Sahel
SOURCE	https://africacenter.org/spotlight/five-zones-militant-islamist-violence-sahel/
GIST	<p>The western Sahel has seen a quadrupling in the number of militant Islamist group events since 2019. The 2,800 violent events projected for 2022 represent a doubling in the past year. This violence has expanded in intensity and geographic reach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of the 135 administrative districts in Mali, Burkina Faso, and western Niger, 84 districts, or nearly two-thirds, have experienced violent extremist attacks in 2022. In 2017, this figure was less than one-third (40 districts). • More than 80 percent of all violent events took place in 30 districts of northern and central Mali in 2017. In 2022, more than two-thirds of the violent events linked to militant Islamist groups in the Sahel took place outside of Mali, mostly in Burkina Faso. • Seven administrative districts in the Sahel are each projected to suffer more than 100 violent events in 2022. This 100-event threshold had only been crossed 5 times before this year. <p>Often overlooked in these grim trendlines are the differentiated security contexts that comprise this theatre. Five distinct zones emerge, each with varied conflict dynamics: the Tri-Border, North Central Burkina Faso, Central Mali, Southeast and Southwest Burkina Faso, and Western Niger. Collectively, these five zones encompass over 70 percent of militant Islamist violence in the Sahel. Unpacking the features shaping each of these respective zones provides insights into the customized approaches needed to reverse these trends.</p> <p>Tri-Border</p> <p>This zone covers parts of northern Mali and a region of Burkina Faso and Niger known as Liptako-Gourma. Historically dominated by pastoralist populations, notably the Fulani but also the Tuareg and Gourma peoples, this zone has become the epicenter of violence in the Sahel. Several militant groups, including remnants of the Burkinabe group, Ansaroul Islam, fight under the banner of the Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) coalition. Others are aligned with the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The five districts of Ansongo, Gao, Oudalan, Soum, and Séno account for nearly a quarter of all violent episodes linked to militant Islamist groups in the Sahel. Four of these five districts are projected to witness more than 100 violent events in 2022. • Burkina Faso's Oudalan district, which borders Mali and Niger, is projected to be the site of more than 175 violent events. For the second year in a row, Oudalan will suffer the highest concentration of violence in the Sahel. • More than one-third of the civilians killed during 2022 by militant Islamist groups in the Sahel have lost their lives in one of these five districts. More than 340 civilians are projected to be killed by militant Islamist groups in both Ansongo and Séno districts in 2022. • There are sharp divisions in the militant Islamist groups linked to the violence in this zone. The vast majority of violent extremist activities in Ansongo (92 percent), Oudalan (88 percent), and Séno (95 percent) are attributed to the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). An offshoot of previously established militant groups in the region, ISGS collects a coercive and heavy zakat

(tax) in the tri-border zone, as well as engages in cattle rustling for revenue. Meanwhile events in Soum, the birthplace of [Ansaroul Islam](#), are overwhelmingly attributed to [the Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimin \(JNIM\) coalition](#) (98 percent). Events in Gao are roughly split between the two networks.

North Central Burkina Faso

This zone has experienced one of the most rapid escalations of violence in the Sahel. Militants from the [Macina Liberation Front \(FLM\)](#), part of the JNIM coalition, along with remnants of Ansaroul Islam, have pushed farther south into this more populated area of Burkina Faso (with nearly 3 million inhabitants). The [violence has displaced nearly 2 million Burkinabe](#), many seeking refuge at a displaced persons camp in Kaya, the regional capital and fifth largest urban center in Burkina Faso. This is also [an area with significant gold deposits](#) including at least three industrial mines and dozens of registered artisanal mines. Militant Islamist groups seek to [control these sites as a major source of revenue](#) for their activities.

- In 2017, only one violent event linked to militant Islamist groups took place in the five districts of this zone—Bam, Loroum, Namentenga, Sanmentenga, and Yatenga. More than 450 violent incidents are projected to take place in this zone in 2022, representing 16 percent of all events in the Sahel.
- This zone has become a primary site of FLM/JNIM expansion into Burkina Faso. ISGS-linked events account for less than 10 percent of events in this area and have occurred almost entirely in Namentenga.
- Violence against civilians (two of every three violent events targeted civilians in 2019) has led to massive population displacements from this zone, enabling FLM and other JNIM-linked groups to effectively control this territory.

Central Mali

Central Mali has been the stronghold of FLM since 2015. Led by extremist preacher Amadou Koufa, FLM's violence has dramatically shifted insecurity in Mali from the more remote northern regions to the central districts of Bandiagara, Bankass, Djenné, Douentza, Koro, and Mopti—collectively comprising a population of some 1.5 million people.

Koufa has imposed a harsh version of Sharia to resolve land and resource disputes and has imposed strict behavior rules (especially on women) over significant parts of Central Mali. He has also strategically exploited intercommunal differences, [playing up pastoralist grievances as a means to drive recruitment](#). From this base, FLM has recently led a surge into western and southern Mali becoming increasingly [capable of threatening the capital Bamako](#). This comes after FLM successfully supported JNIM elements pushing into northern Burkina Faso and to a lesser degree farther south into southwestern Burkina Faso.

- Overall, violent events in this zone represent 14 percent of all such episodes in the Sahel and 40 percent of all the incidents in Mali. Since 2019, levels of violence in these districts have been among the highest concentrations in Mali. The number of events increased by roughly one-third in 2020, then by 50 percent in 2021, and is projected to increase again by 33 percent in 2022.
- FLM routinely targets civilians in Central Mali. By the end of the year, more than 500 civilians are projected to be killed in violent events linked to militant Islamist groups in this zone.
- All violent events in the Central Mali zone in 2022 are linked to FLM and Amadou Koufa. A handful of violent events linked to ISGS took place in previous years, predominantly in Douentza, before FLM more firmly consolidated its control over the fringes of Central Mali.

Southeast and Southwest Burkina Faso

Nearly all of the incidents in Southeast and Southwest Burkina Faso are attributed to militant groups linked to JNIM. This is consistent with the long history of JNIM-affiliated militants collaborating with criminal, smuggling, and trafficking networks across West Africa.

Southeast Burkina Faso. Starting in 2019, a surge of violent activity attributed to JNIM destabilized eastern Burkina Faso along the border with Niger. Since 2021, it has become increasingly concentrated in the district of Gourma at the center of Burkina Faso's Southeast. Militant Islamist groups use the [parklands](#)

[in this zone](#) that extend into the territories of Niger, Benin, and Togo for staging attacks into these littoral states. This area is also key to gold smuggling networks connected to Togo as well as other criminal and poaching rings that rely on commercial routes between the countries to move illicit goods.

- Gourma is projected to experience the second highest number of violent events (155) linked to militant Islamist groups in the Sahel. Boulgou and Koulpélogo districts have also faced skyrocketing levels of militant Islamist group expansion. More than 100 events are projected to occur in these two districts in 2022 after only three events were recorded in 2021. Boulgou and Koulpélogo border Ghana and Togo, respectively.
- Militant groups linked to JNIM targeted civilians in nearly half of their attacks in Southeast Burkina Faso during 2022, resulting in an estimated 188 fatalities.

Southwest Burkina Faso. The borderlands between Burkina Faso, Mali, and Côte d'Ivoire exhibit well-developed illicit smuggling and small arms trafficking networks that accompany goods being transported through Côte d'Ivoire to commercial hubs in Mali and Burkina Faso. This area is also developing into a new locus of artisanal gold mining. The 60-percent increase in militant attacks in this zone may be an indication of JNIM-linked groups attempting to capture some of these revenues.

- The district of Poni is projected to experience 34 violent events in 2022, after facing just 4 the previous year.

Littoral West Africa. FLM and other JNIM-linked militants are [threatening communities in the northern regions of littoral West Africa](#). Violent events linked to these groups have occurred in ten districts located in northern Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, and Togo. Though activities in these northern areas remain a small percentage of the overall violence, the expanding presence of militant Islamist groups in these areas is cause for concern.

Western Niger

While militant violence in Niger represents less than 10 percent of the total faced across the region, Niger is threatened by the surge in violent activity across its borders.

ISGS has been the primary militant group attempting to exploit Niger's borders with Mali and Burkina Faso to expand its influence over remote communities. Moreover, violence against civilians, as a proportion of all violence, is much higher in Niger. Militant Islamist groups target civilians in more than half of their attacks in this zone as communities here have attempted to resist ISGS's extortion through collection of an abusive zakat tax. The districts of Tillia, Ouallam, and Banibangou have been particularly devastated.

Gothèye and Torodi are the only districts where JNIM operates in Western Niger. Torodi borders Southeast Burkina Faso where JNIM has made an aggressive push, using parklands and reserves as a safe haven.

The 174 violent events projected in Western Niger in 2022 represent a nearly 10-percent increase from the previous year.

Takeaways

Drilling into the dynamics shaping insecurity in the respective zonal hotspots provides valuable insights into the broader trajectory of militant Islamist violence in the Sahel that can help better align resources and mitigation strategies. Several overarching takeaways emerge:

- Three zones—Central Mali, Tri-Border, and North Central Burkina Faso—comprise over half (55 percent) of all violent events in the region. This underscores the importance of Central Mali as a base and staging area for attacks into neighboring zones.
- Militant Islamist groups in the Sahel continue to exploit border areas where they can take advantage of a diminished security presence. Districts abutting national borders represent 65 percent of all violent incidents recorded in 2022.
- Exposed borders remain the key vulnerability for Niger and the littoral states given the intensifying levels of attacks across their borders.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The targeting of civilians appears to be a deliberate tactic to intimidate local communities into cooperation or to force their displacement, providing militant Islamist groups both greater leverage and territorial control. • At least part of the violence against civilians is aimed at controlling revenues from gold and trafficking networks, reflecting the increasingly criminal nature of militant group activity in several of these zones.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/26 Somalia fights terrorists w/US support
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/federal-government-of-somalia-engages-terrorists-with-support-from-u-s-forces/
GIST	<p>At the request of the Federal Government of Somalia, U.S. Africa Command conducted an airstrike against al-Shabaab terrorists who were attacking Somali National Army forces near Buulobarde, Somalia, on Sept. 18.</p> <p>The command's initial assessment is that the strike killed 27 al-Shabaab terrorists and that no civilians were injured. U.S. forces are authorized to conduct strikes in defense of designated partner forces. The defensive strikes allowed the Somali National Army and African Union Transition Mission in Somalia forces to regain the initiative and continue the operation to disrupt al-Shabaab in the Hiraaan region of central Somalia. This operation is the largest combined Somali and ATMIS offensive operation in five years.</p> <p>U.S. Africa Command take great measures to prevent civilian casualties. These efforts contrast with the indiscriminate attacks that al-Shabaab regularly conducts against the civilian population.</p> <p>Violent extremist organizations like al-Shabaab present long-term threats to Somali, regional and U.S. interests. The U.S. will continue to support Somali and ATMIS partners in defeating al-Shabaab terrorists who threaten the peace and stability of Somalia.</p>
Return to Top	Read more at AFRICOM

HEADLINE	09/26 ISIS: US 'banana republic' for Islamic storm
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/featured/isis-cites-mar-a-lago-search-quotes-trump-in-declaring-u-s-a-banana-republic-ready-for-islamic-storm/
GIST	<p>ISIS referenced last month's execution of a search warrant at Mar-a-Lago and the reactions of former President Trump and Donald Trump Jr. in declaring that the United States has descended into a "banana republic" ripe for an "Islamic storm" in the terror group's favor.</p> <p>The latest issue of <i>Voice of Khurasan</i>, published by ISIS Khorasan Province's Al Azaim Foundation for Media Production, includes an article titled "America from the Land of Free to a Banana Republic" that begins by questioning the division of countries into first-world and third-world classifications, arguing that they support "neo-colonialization."</p> <p>"Donald Trump, an ex-US president who gained animalistic pleasure in butchering innocent Muslims of the third world countries, accused their Federal administration of behaving like the corrupt thugs of the third world countries, when on August 8 the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) raided his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida in search of classified documents," the magazine said. "This ex-president of the US condemned this raid: 'An assault [that] could only take place in broken, third-world countries.' He continued to decry that America has 'now become one of those countries, corrupt at a level not seen before.'"</p> <p>Those quotes are from a statement attributed to the former president released by Trump's Save America PAC on the day of the search.</p>

“Donald Trump’s son, Donald Trump Jr, lamented on Twitter: ‘This is what you see happen in 3rd World Banana Republics!!!’,” the ISIS-K article said. “Nevertheless, the FBI’s raid for seizure of classified documents is nothing new in unearthing the real picture of the US which is not any less ugly than the third world countries in any sense. The US is an oligarchic country who can choose its president who is a non-taxpaying billionaire running electoral campaign by the taxpayers’ money and it is country whose foreign policy is mainly dictated by the high-tech arms manufacturing corporations who test their weapons on innocent women and children of the third world countries.”

“This is not the first time Trump has become helpless to put the label of ‘Third-World Country’ on his own country,” the terror group continued. “Such was his rhetoric when he lost the 2020 presidential election to Joe Biden. But Trump is not the only member of the US ruling elite to make use of such vocabulary out of anger due to own impotency. However, by lampooning the third world nations, the US politicians might have forgotten their country’s historical role in creation of the ‘banana republics,’ and they might have overlooked the aftermath of the ‘banana republic’ syndrome present in their own country.”

ISIS-K proceeded to declare that “poverty, healthcare, and other indicators clearly suggest that US citizens are enjoying no better lifestyle than those of the ‘banana republics.’” Three photos of tent encampments sheltering the homeless were included in the article. The terror group then said that “failure in the domestic level” was “the direct outcome” of international security expenditures “especially on the Muslims,” and predicted that citizens living under “severe frustration... looking for a way out from their predicament” could convert in “an Islamic storm.”

“And preventing the repeat of Islamic history on the US soil is far beyond the capacity of the impotent and arrogant US politicians,” ISIS-K added. “And the wind of change can clearly be felt.”

The terror group has recently sounded off on other U.S. domestic matters. In the July *Voice of Khurasan* [issue](#), ISIS-K called mass shootings and other gun violence in America “tit for tat” and an “‘unwanted’ population control program” that, despite the motives of white supremacist or grievance-driven domestic shooters, is divine retribution for the U.S. war on terror.

After citing gun violence statistics, the article revealed ISIS’ ideological motive in expressing concern about mass shootings committed by perpetrators other than their own operatives, declaring that America “never considered that their pointless war on Islam, in the name of ‘war on terror,’ will be answered in a divinely dictated way, when a shooter having nothing to do with Islam and ‘radicalization’ (in their words) welcomes a mass gathering of US civilians with several rounds of automatic rifle, scoring death toll like the ‘zombies’ do in video games.”

“The Americans will be paid back in such a divine way, from the Lord of the worlds, until they step back from their bellicose foreign policy,” the article concluded.

In a May [issue](#), the magazine invoked recent hot-button elements of the culture war and talking points arising from debate over issues including sex education, LGBT acceptance and the teaching of evolution as the group argued that “democracy and all that emanates from it is retarded and perverse” and attempted to woo recruits to their extremism.

“These democracies teach children, as young as six, about sex and sexually transmitted diseases as part of their curriculum, together with drug abuse in order to prevent the new generation from being influenced by the widespread ills of their societies,” the ISIS-K article said. “There is a culture of free mixing in the educational institutions where they are encouraged to learn, try and test sexual activities between themselves. Homosexuality is taught as something that is normal and part of the genetic makeup and that we should be tolerant of people of such tendencies. The education is secular taught from the angle of atheism using insane and refuted ideas, such as evolution, to try and fill the void.”

“Do you really want to live in a society that has no bounds allowing and tolerating all possible views and practices?” the terror group said.

	<p>ISIS-K has also published an article promoting the spread of disinformation as a “duty” of jihadists in order to deceive and ultimately divide their foes and a tactic that should be considered “part of the war policy,” as well as a piece urging a concerted focus on “social media warfare” as critical to advancing on the ideological battlefield and countering the pull of “enchanted” social media influencers.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 Kurdish militants attack Turkish police
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/kurdish-militants-attack-turkish-police-kill-90562910
GIST	<p>ANKARA, Turkey -- Two suspected Kurdish militants opened fire on police in southern Turkey and later killed themselves by detonating suicide bombs, Turkey’s interior minister said. One police officer was killed in the attack while a second officer and a civilian were wounded.</p> <p>The attack was carried out late on Monday in the Mezitli district in the Mediterranean coastal province of Mersin, by two women affiliated with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party, or PKK, Interior Minister Suleyman Soyly told reporters.</p> <p>They fired on police guarding a hotel for security officers, touching off clashes between them and police and a group of night guards who rushed to the scene, Soyly said.</p> <p>“The women terrorists were wounded during these clashes. As the clashes continued, two separate explosions were heard,” the minister said. “Because they were wounded, they understood they would not be able to escape and they (killed) themselves.”</p> <p>Soyly said a woman who was sitting on a balcony near the scene was hit by a stray bullet during the clashes. Neither she nor the second police officer was seriously hurt, he said.</p> <p>There was no immediate comment from the militant group.</p> <p>The PKK is considered a terrorist organization in Turkey, Europe and the United States. It has led an armed insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984 and the conflict has killed tens of thousands of people since then.</p> <p>A fragile cease-fire and peace talks between the state and the PKK collapsed in the summer of 2015.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/26 Activist targeted pipeline sentenced 6yrs
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/climate-activist-targeted-dakota-access-pipeline-sentenced-years/story?id=90546657
GIST	<p>A federal judge last week ordered Ruby Montoya, a 32-year-old climate activist, to serve six years in prison for her role in damaging the Dakota Access Pipeline -- a sentence that federal prosecutors said they hope will deter others who plan to engage in what they characterized as "domestic terrorism."</p> <p>Montoya, who pleaded guilty to one charge of conspiring to damage an energy facility, and 42-year-old activist Jessica Reznicek snuck through security fences, set fire to equipment and used chemicals to burn holes in the pipeline itself from 2016 to 2017, according to their plea agreements.</p> <p>On Thursday, in addition to Montoya's prison sentence, U.S. District Judge Rebecca Ebinger ordered the pair to pay more than \$3 million in restitution.</p> <p>In 2021, after pleading guilty to one count of conspiracy to damage an energy facility, Reznicek was sentenced to eight years in prison. Notably, both women faced sentencing enhancements under a criminal statute designed to penalize acts of domestic terrorism.</p>

"The sentence imposed today demonstrates that any crime of domestic terrorism will be aggressively investigated and prosecuted by the federal government," U.S. Attorney Richard D. Westphal said Thursday in a statement responding to Montoya's sentencing.

The terrorism enhancement traces back to the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, after which Congress enacted tougher penalties to deter acts of "intimidation or coercion" aimed at the government or civilian population.

Terrorism sentences have since been applied almost exclusively to defendants with ties to overseas extremist groups like the Islamic State group or al-Qaida or to domestic extremists [like Cesar Sayoc](#), who pleaded guilty in 2018 to mailing pipe bombs to members of Congress.

In the wake of Reznicek's sentencing last year, critics argued that the law has been too broadly and inconsistently applied -- especially to so-called "ecoterrorists" like Reznicek and Montoya.

"I believe 100% that this is an overreach of power," said Sen. Ed Markey, D-Mass. "And it is absolutely imperative that we put guidelines in place."

Last month, those concerns attracted renewed attention after a federal judge declined to apply it to one of the most high-profile defendants in the Jan. 6 insurrection.

Guy Wesley Reffitt, a 49-year-old Texas militiaman [who was convicted in March](#) of obstruction and other crimes, brought a weapon to the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, and threatened to "physically attack, remove and replace" lawmakers, making him a "quintessential" case for the enhancement, prosecutors wrote in a July sentencing memorandum.

Even so, before handing down an 87-month prison sentence in August, U.S. Judge Dabney Friedrich declined prosecutors' request to consider Reffitt's offence as domestic terrorism. In rejecting the enhancement, Friedrich sided with Reffitt's defense counsel, who accused prosecutors of utilizing the tool as retribution for Reffitt taking the case to trial rather than accepting a plea agreement.

Reznicek appealed her sentencing in the pipeline case, citing the district court's application of the terrorism sentencing enhancement. In June, a circuit court upheld her prison term.

Attorneys for Montoya did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

[Return to Top](#)

Suspicious, Unusual

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Pipeline expansion endangers climate?
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/sep/27/huge-expansion-oil-pipelines-endangering-climate-says-report
GIST	<p>More than 24,000km of new oil pipelines are under development around the world, a distance equivalent to almost twice the Earth's diameter, a report has revealed. The projects, led by the US, Russia, China and India, are "dramatically at odds with plans to limit global warming to 1.5C or 2C", the researchers said.</p> <p>The oil pumped through the pipelines would produce at least 5bn tonnes of CO₂ a year if completed, equivalent to the emissions of the US, the world's second largest polluter. About 40% of the pipelines are already under construction, with the rest in planning. Global carbon emissions must drop by 50% by 2030 to keep on track with internationally agreed targets for limiting global heating.</p>

The developers of the 10,000km of pipelines in construction stand to lose up to \$75bn (£70bn) if action on the climate crisis prevents the new pipelines being fully used, according to the analysts at [Global Energy Monitor \(GEM\) who produced the report](#).

Russia, which is facing oil and gas boycotts from the west over the war in Ukraine and wants to increase exports to India and China, is developing 2,000km of new pipelines.
Advertisement

Regionally, sub-Saharan Africa is leading the world in pipeline development, with 2,000km of oil pipelines already under construction and an additional 4,500km proposed. The projects include the [controversial East African crude oil pipeline](#), which will transport oil drilled from a national park in Uganda to an export terminal on the coast of Tanzania.

“For governments endorsing these new pipelines, the report shows an almost deliberate failure to meet climate goals,” said Baird Langenbrunner at GEM. “Despite climate targets threatening to render fossil fuel infrastructure as stranded assets, the world’s biggest consumers of fossil fuels, led by the US and China, are doubling down on oil pipeline expansion.”

The oil industry enjoyed record profits in the last year, the report said, and “is using this moment of chaos and crisis to push ahead with massive expansions of oil pipeline networks”.

The UN secretary-general, António Guterres, [told world leaders](#) gathered in New York on Wednesday: “The fossil fuel industry is killing us, and leaders are out of step with their people, who are crying out for urgent climate action.”

The Guardian revealed in May that the world’s biggest fossil fuel firms are planning scores of [“carbon bomb” oil and gas projects](#) that would drive the climate past the temperature targets with catastrophic global impacts. In May 2021, the International Energy Agency said [new oil and gas fields were incompatible](#) with the world remaining within relatively safe limits of global heating.

The new report found that the length of pipeline in construction has more than doubled compared with GEM’s assessment in 2019, while the length of proposed pipeline has roughly halved.

The US is the world leader for pipelines in development. “A major push to increase crude oil export capacity out of the Permian basin [in Texas and New Mexico] along the Gulf coast is arguably a make-or-break moment for the industry, which is gradually losing its social licence to build new projects as the impacts of the climate crisis become more severe,” the report said.

India is the leader for pipelines under construction, including the 1,630km Paradip Numaligarh crude pipeline in the north-east of the country, which is expected to come online in late 2024.

Russia is aiming to expand its oil exports along the Northern Sea Route, which is becoming more accessible as global heating melts Arctic sea ice. The proposed Vostok oil pipeline is 1,600km long.

Data on the capacity of the new pipelines was only available for two-thirds of the pipelines in the report, but these would carry 30bn barrels a day for decades if they continued operating to the end of their typical lifetimes. When burned, this oil would produce 4.6bn tonnes of CO2 annually. The GEM analysis did not include projects that had failed to advance its development in the last two years, classifying these separately as shelved.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/26 Drones over stadiums delay football games
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/drones-stadiums-delayed-seahawks-husky-games/281-10438751-2f1a-485b-8a6f-793dd74759e6

GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Drones over stadiums caused delays during Saturday's University of Washington Football game and Sunday's Seattle Seahawks game.</p> <p>Neither aircraft was associated with the games or organizations.</p> <p>The first spotting was during the fourth quarter of the UW against Stanford game. UW Head Coach Kalen DeBoer said during a press conference on Monday the aircraft was not associated with UW Athletics.</p> <p>The second spotting was during the fourth quarter of Sunday's Seahawks versus Falcons game at Lumen Field.</p> <p>The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) prohibits drones within three miles of a stadium one hour before and one hour after events in the following sports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major League Baseball • National Football League • NCAA Division One Football • NASCAR Sprint Cup, Indy Car and Champ Series races <p>"I doubt they launched it from inside the stadium. They could have been standing [outside] and flown it in and flying it blind essentially, which is another rules violation," said Greg Thies, the Chief Safety Officer for the drone program operated by KING5's parent company, Tegna.</p> <p>Thies oversees training and safety operations for 150 drones pilots at Tegna's 42 television stations.</p> <p>In some cases the FAA can grant special permission to fly a drone over a stadium, but Thies said there are several safety factors taken into account including the size and weight of the drone.</p> <p>"There are rules around flying the drones and rules for good reason. For safety and not to be interrupting and quite honestly working outside the context of what they're supposed to be used for," Thies said.</p> <p>The FAA said flying an unauthorized drone over a stadium may results in civil penalties up to \$37,377 and potential criminal prosecution.</p> <p>Thies said changes are coming that will make pilots in unauthorized flights easier to identify. Starting September 16, 2023, drones will be required to have Remote Identification capabilities. The FAA said it acts like a digital license plate and will help locate control stations when a flight is happening in an unsafe or unauthorized manner.</p> <p>"Especially in big events such as this, [the FAA] would probably have the equipment on hand to immediately identify where that aircraft is being operated from...Not only who owns the aircraft but where the operator is on the ground. So they would be able to have a much more specific response to what was going on," Thies said.</p> <p>The FAA said Seattle Police is investigating the violation at the Seahawks game. As of Monday afternoon, UW had not filed a formal report with the FAA.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/26 Success! NASA first planetary defense test
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/science/nasa-spacecraft-closes-in-on-asteroid-for-head-on-collision/
GIST	<p>CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — A NASA spacecraft rammed an asteroid at blistering speed Monday in an unprecedented dress rehearsal for the day a killer rock menaces Earth.</p> <p>The galactic slam occurred at a harmless asteroid 7 million miles (11.3 million kilometers) away, with the spacecraft named Dart plowing into the space rock at 14,000 mph (22,500 kph). Scientists expected the</p>

impact to carve out a crater, hurl streams of rocks and dirt into space and, most importantly, alter the asteroid's orbit.

"We have impact!" Mission Control's Elena Adams announced, jumping up and down and thrusting her arms skyward.

Telescopes around the world and in space aimed at the same point in the sky to capture the spectacle. Though the impact was immediately obvious — Dart's radio signal abruptly ceased — it will take as long as a couple of months to determine how much the asteroid's path was changed.

The \$325 million mission was the first attempt to shift the position of an asteroid or any other natural object in space.

"As far as we can tell, our first planetary defense test was a success," Adams later told a news conference, the room filling with applause. "I think Earthlings should sleep better. Definitely, I will."

NASA Administrator Bill Nelson reminded people earlier in the day via Twitter that, "No, this is not a movie plot." He added in a prerecorded video: "We've all seen it on movies like "Armageddon," but the real-life stakes are high."

Monday's target: a 525-foot (160-meter) asteroid named Dimorphos. It's a moonlet of Didymos, Greek for twin, a fast-spinning asteroid five times bigger that flung off the material that formed the junior partner.

The pair have been orbiting the sun for eons without threatening Earth, making them ideal save-the-world test candidates.

Launched last November, the vending machine-size Dart — short for Double Asteroid Redirection Test — navigated to its target using new technology developed by Johns Hopkins University's Applied Physics Laboratory, the spacecraft builder and mission manager.

Dart's on-board camera, a key part of this smart navigation system, caught sight of Dimorphos barely an hour before impact. "Woo hoo!" exclaimed Adams, a mission systems engineer at Johns Hopkins.

With an image beaming back to Earth every second, Adams and other ground controllers in Laurel, Maryland, watched with growing excitement as Dimorphos loomed larger and larger in the field of view alongside its bigger companion. Within minutes, Dimorphos was alone in the pictures; it looked like a giant gray lemon, but with boulders and rubble on the surface. The last image froze on the screen as the radio transmission ended.

Flight controllers cheered, hugged one another and exchanged high fives. Their mission complete, the Dart team went straight into celebration mode. There was little sorrow over the spacecraft's demise.

"Normally, losing signal from a spacecraft is a very bad thing. But in this case, it was the ideal outcome," said NASA program scientist Tom Statler.

Johns Hopkins scientist Carolyn Ernst said the spacecraft was definitely "kaput," with remnants possibly in the fresh crater or cascading into space with the asteroid's ejected material.

Scientists insisted Dart would not shatter Dimorphos. The spacecraft packed a scant 1,260 pounds (570 kilograms), compared with the asteroid's 11 billion pounds (5 billion kilograms). But that should be plenty to shrink its 11-hour, 55-minute orbit around Didymos.

The impact should pare 10 minutes off that. The anticipated orbital shift of 1% might not sound like much, scientists noted. But they stressed it would amount to a significant change over years.

“Now is when the science starts,” said NASA’s Lori Glaze, planetary science division director. “Now we’re going to see for real how effective we were.”

Planetary defense experts prefer nudging a threatening asteroid or comet out of the way, given enough lead time, rather than blowing it up and creating multiple pieces that could rain down on Earth. Multiple impactors might be needed for big space rocks or a combination of impactors and so-called gravity tractors, not-yet-invented devices that would use their own gravity to pull an asteroid into a safer orbit.

“The dinosaurs didn’t have a space program to help them know what was coming, but we do,” NASA’s senior climate adviser Katherine Calvin said, referring to the mass extinction 66 million years ago believed to have been caused by a major asteroid impact, volcanic eruptions or both.

The non-profit B612 Foundation, dedicated to protecting Earth from asteroid strikes, has been pushing for impact tests like Dart since its founding by astronauts and physicists 20 years ago. Monday’s feat aside, the world must do a better job of identifying the countless space rocks lurking out there, warned the foundation’s executive director, Ed Lu, a former astronaut.

Significantly less than half of the estimated 25,000 near-Earth objects in the deadly 460-foot (140-meter) range have been discovered, according to NASA. And fewer than 1% of the millions of smaller asteroids, capable of widespread injuries, are known.

The Vera Rubin Observatory, nearing completion in Chile by the National Science Foundation and U.S. Energy Department, promises to revolutionize the field of asteroid discovery, Lu noted.

Finding and tracking asteroids, “That’s still the name of the game here. That’s the thing that has to happen in order to protect the Earth,” he said.

[Return to Top](#)

Crime, Criminals

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Stores lock up goods to fight theft
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/best-buy-home-depot-lock-up-goods-to-fight-theft-11664277331
GIST	<p>Shoppers are finding more empty space on store shelves, but not because the retailer is out of stock. In many cases, the items are locked away to prevent theft.</p> <p>At a Best Buy Co. store in the suburbs of Houston, hundreds of items including Bose speakers and Fitbit activity trackers have been replaced by small blue signs that read, “This product kept in secured location,” and ask shoppers to find store workers for help. Apple watches priced at \$529 are locked in metal cages.</p> <p>“There used to be a lot more on the floor itself than locked up in cages,” said Gary Pearce, a 47-year-old manager at a disaster restoration company who shops in the store weekly.</p> <p>The store is a sign of an endemic challenge for retailers: how to stop theft without shrinking profits or inconveniencing shoppers. Retailers have long dealt with theft, and frequency is down from a peak last winter for some, said retail executives. But theft attempt levels are higher than they were before the pandemic.</p> <p>Many large retailers, including Home Depot Inc., have been locking up more items while testing other solutions. They track high-risk goods and lock up items in regions or stores being hit hardest, retail executives say. Best Buy says it isn’t locking up more items overall than in the past, but continues to do so where needed.</p>

It is a tactic that risks annoying customers and investors. In July a Best Buy analyst recommended selling the company's stock after he observed conditions in dozens of stores and found items locked up or missing from shelves.

"Putting products in cages certainly deters theft, but it probably hinders sales," said R5 Capital CEO Scott Mushkin in the report titled "Heartbreaking." Some stores, like one in Danbury, Conn., were in good shape, said the report, while others were messy or didn't have enough items easily available for shoppers to buy.

Best Buy declined to comment on the research.

Around \$69.9 billion worth of products were stolen from retailers in 2019, according to the most recent data from the Retail Industry Leaders Association, which surveyed members.

[Theft surged after stores reopened](#) early in the pandemic, retail industry executives say. In part, the rush to buy more online during that period led to more demand online for stolen goods, they say. In some cases [stores have been understaffed due to the tight labor market](#) or staffing choices, which means fewer watchful eyes, say some executives. In addition, well-organized theft groups working regionally have become prevalent, making the problem harder to solve than run-of-the-mill shoplifting.

Many retailers use a risk algorithm to determine which items to lock up and in what locations. A high-value item that is frequently stolen is a good candidate, say executives. Retailers often try other deterrents first, like moving a product closer to staffed registers, attaching an alarm that is removed at checkout or using more visible security staff.

Less-expensive items can get similar treatment. "For a store to be locking things up like toothpaste, Spam or honey, they would have had to have been repeatedly targeted over a period of time," said Ben Dugan, director of organized retail crime at [CVS Health](#) Corp. and president of the Coalition of Law Enforcement and Retail, a group that facilitates planning between retailers and law enforcement.

[Home Depot](#) has been locking up more products during the past 12 months as a stopgap while testing more customer-friendly, higher-tech solutions, according to the company.

"It's a triage-type scenario. It's stop the bleeding and give yourself some time," said Scott Glenn, vice president of asset protection at Home Depot.

Overall theft attempts at Home Depot continue to rise compared with before the pandemic, Mr. Glenn said. Shoppers don't like when items are locked and Home Depot tries to avoid it, he said. But after a high-theft item is locked up, sales gradually go up because the store stays more consistently in-stock, Mr. Glenn said. In stores where Home Depot has aggressive theft deterrents, it has reduced loss to theft, he said.

Best Buy has long locked up some products as a large retailer of high-value electronics, say executives. Across all U.S. stores, less than 5% of its products are locked up or in backrooms for theft-protection reasons, about the same percentage as previous years, said Damien Harmon, executive vice president of omnichannel for the company.

Included in the 5% figures is a tactic Best Buy started using last winter as retail theft jumped, he said. The company replaced some products on shelves with QR codes so shoppers could scan, then head to registers to pay and pick up the product.

In some locations including the Houston Best Buy—which sits in an area where many local stores face elevated levels of crime, according to data from the local police department—the share of locked items can be higher. Shopper Mr. Pearce said he understood the extreme measures given the threat of theft.

Advertisement - Scroll to Continue

Best Buy's store inventory is being held differently than it has in the past, with less on floors due to more buying online, said Mr. Harmon. Products are brought to shoppers directly, which has the added benefit of also reducing theft, said Mr. Harmon.

After an item is locked, Best Buy watches sales trends and doesn't get many comments about products being locked up, said Mr. Harmon. The company is also experimenting with training store staff to stand near high-theft items, he said. Its internal customer experience scores for stores are at a 15-year high, said a spokeswoman.

InVue, a Charlotte, N.C., company that sells retailers locked glass cabinets, tracking sensors and software, late last year started getting requests from retailers asking for more customer-friendly options, said Chris Gibson, InVue's chief product and marketing officer.

InVue is pitching more automated solutions that are more aesthetically pleasing or make it easier for store workers or shoppers to unlock a product quickly. Locking down products "became this draconian thing" during the pandemic, said Mr. Gibson. "A lot of our partners are saying, maybe that was a bridge too far."

Browsing videogames at the local Best Buy used to be fun, said Zion Grassl, a 30-year-old video producer for a videogame website. Over the summer his local Best Buy in Eugene, Ore., removed the physical videogames from store shelves, he said, swapped with photocopy images of the front of the box that provide less information about the game.

Mr. Grassl said he understands the need to protect products from theft, but the change ruins the experience of browsing for something you didn't know you needed.

"You still have this physical representation to look at, but it's almost like they don't want you to come in anymore," he said.

Best Buy declined to comment on Mr. Grassl's views.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/26 Bomb threat shuts portion SR 20 for hours
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/portion-of-highway-20-in-oak-harbor-shut-down-due-to-bomb-threat
GIST	<p>OAK HARBOR, Wash. - A portion of State Route 20 on the south end of Oak Harbor was shut down for several hours while police and explosive experts investigated a bomb threat.</p> <p>Around 3:30 p.m., police shut down SR 20 near SW Barlow Street for "a potential concern with a vehicle as a hazard in the area."</p> <p>Oak Harbor Police Chief Kevin Dresker told the Whidbey News-Times that a man who was due in court on Tuesday threatened to bomb the courthouse.</p> <p>When police found the man in his car at a Wendy's, he told officers that he didn't have any explosives and had no intention of blowing anything up, the Whidbey News-Times reported.</p> <p>Out of an abundance of caution, a Navy explosive-sniffing K9 was used and the dog picked up a hit in the man's trunk.</p> <p>As a result, police evacuated nearby businesses while the investigation was underway. Traffic in that area was rerouted.</p> <p>The Whidbey News-Times says the suspect was arrested on suspicion of making a bomb threat.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/26 Ex-Nigeria official jailed 5yrs: fraud scams
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/ex-nigerian-official-to-serve-5-years-for-unemployment-fraud-scams/
GIST	<p>A former Nigerian official was sentenced to five years for what prosecutors called a “litany of scams” that took in more than \$600,000 in public and private funds, including Washington unemployment benefits intended for pandemic victims.</p> <p>Abidemi Rufai, 45, of Lekki, Nigeria, was sentenced Monday in federal court in Tacoma for crimes ranging from \$350,763 in pandemic unemployment fraud to filing bogus federal tax returns and theft of federal disaster relief money. Prosecutors had asked for nearly six years, along with restitution of \$604,260 for multiple counts of wire fraud and aggravated identity theft for Rufai.</p> <p>The sentence “sends a strong message that these foreign actors who are abroad cannot just simply hide anonymously behind keyboards and that they can be brought to justice in the United States,” said Assistant U.S. Attorney Cindy Chang, who handles COVID fraud for the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Seattle.</p> <p>Rufai, one of the first suspects arrested in Washington’s \$650 million unemployment fraud, was detained in May 2021 at John F. Kennedy International Airport as he allegedly tried to fly back to Nigeria. He had briefly served as an aide to Adedapo Abiodun, governor of Ogun State in Nigeria, before reportedly being suspended following his arrest.</p> <p>Among other crimes, Rufai was charged with using stolen Social Security numbers and other personal data to file dozens of fake claims for pandemic unemployment benefits in Washington and other states. Benefits from those claims were wired into bank accounts either controlled by Rufai or by accomplices known as “money mules.”</p> <p>A pattern of scam and fraud</p> <p>In sentencing documents, prosecutors detailed a pattern of fraud and scams dating back to at least 2017. Rufai used stolen identities of 49 residents of Texas and Florida to file for federal disaster relief for hurricanes Irma and Harvey, according to filings.</p> <p>Rufai also allegedly ran a “mystery shopper” scam, in which he sent counterfeit checks to accomplices who were instructed to deposit the funds and wire most of the money to Rufai, according to sentencing documents. By the time accomplices discovered the checks were worthless, some had already wired thousands of dollars of their own money, according to federal documents.</p> <p>Monday’s sentencing documents also added detail to earlier government characterizations of Rufai as a big-spender using ill-gotten gains to fund a life of unearned luxury and status.</p> <p>During a visit to the U.S. in 2020, Rufai appears to have used fraud proceeds to buy a luxury Mercedes SUV for \$71,620 and shipped it to Nigeria, prosecutors said. At the time of his arrest, Rufai was wearing a Cartier watch and was ticketed for a business class flight to Nigeria.</p> <p>Rufai must also pay \$604,260 in restitution, but federal officials expect they may see less than \$100,000, given that most of Rufai’s remaining assets are likely no longer in the U.S. “It’s really hard to get foreign assets ... in Nigeria,” said Assistant U.S. Attorney Seth Wilkinson, co-counsel in the case.</p> <p>Rufai’s defense attorney, Lance Hester, had asked for a 30-month sentence due to extenuating circumstances that included a “gambling addiction” and “a childhood exposed to untreated trauma” in a country infamous for “government and leadership corruption,” according to defense sentencing filings.</p> <p>Hester also argued sentencing guidelines in such cases are inconsistent and that defendants charged with substantially larger frauds often have received shorter sentences than prosecutors want for Rufai.</p> <p>Rufai asked to serve his sentence at Fort Dix, New Jersey, which Judge Benjamin Settle agreed to recommend, but the decision will be made by the Bureau of Prisons, said a spokesperson for the U.S. Attorney.</p>

Security lapses

Rufai's case offered an embarrassing window into security lapses during the pandemic at the Employment Security Department and other state unemployment agencies, which succumbed to a fraud scheme that was remarkably low tech.

According to federal investigators, Rufai had filed dozens of fake unemployment claims at ESD using a single Gmail account. A feature of Gmail allows account holders to create dozens of additional email addresses simply adding one or more periods to the original address.

Because the Gmail system doesn't recognize periods, any emails sent to those so-called dot-variant addresses are all routed to the inbox of the original Gmail address.

At the time of Rufai's arrest, ESD officials declined to say whether the agency's systems had detected dot-variant email addresses during the wave of fraud that hit Washington and other states in early 2020, or whether it has since upgraded its claims system to block similar claims.

"For security reasons, we can't comment on what our systems do or do not screen for," said then-ESD spokesman Nick Demerice. "I can say that we learned a lot from the initial attack on our system and make continuous improvements to avoid additional losses."

But while the dot variants appear to have evaded ESD's security, they also allowed federal investigators to track Rufai.

"This guy thought that we'd never know who he was," Wilkinson said. "He thought that by using these fake email accounts, they could remain anonymous enough that he could travel to the United States and get away with it."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Chicago cops shoot police facility intruder
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/09/27/us/chicago-police-facility-intruder-shot/index.html
GIST	<p>A SWAT training session at a Chicago police facility turned into a real-life dangerous situation Monday morning when a man climbed five stories on a fire escape and entered the training room, officials said.</p> <p>After entering through a door that was propped open, the man grabbed at least two guns that did not have live rounds in them from a table in the room and pointed them at officers, Chicago Police Superintendent David Brown said during a news conference.</p> <p>The suspect, whom police haven't named, was shot by responding officers and hospitalized with non-life-threatening injuries, Brown said.</p> <p>The incident began when the man approached the building and asked a guard where he could retrieve personal property, Brown said</p> <p>Instead of heading for the public entrance, the man then walked around the Homan Square building until he reached an exterior fire escape staircase and climbed to the fifth floor.</p> <p>"There is SWAT training occurring on that fifth floor, and the exterior door to that training is propped open because there's no windows or ventilation on that particular floor," Brown explained.</p> <p>Officers saw the man enter the training area and grab two weapons off a table, the superintendent said.</p> <p>"These were guns that were being watched," Brown said. "Obviously, someone coming from a stairwell outside startled everyone."</p>

	<p>Officers in the training room notified other armed officers in the building who responded immediately and fired at the suspect, Brown said, without detailing where suspect was shot.</p> <p>One officer suffered a sprained ankle while responding to the incident, Brown said.</p> <p>The Civilian Office of Police Accountability (COPA) is conducting an investigation into the shooting.</p>
Return to Top	

Information From Online Communities and Unclassified Sources/InFOCUS is a situational awareness report published daily by the Washington State Fusion Center.

If you no longer wish to receive this report, please submit an email to intake@wsfc.wa.gov and enter UNSUBSCRIBE InFOCUS in the Subject line.

DISCLAIMER - the articles highlighted within InFOCUS is for informational purposes only and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Washington State Fusion Center, the City of Seattle, the Seattle Police Department or the Washington State Patrol and have been included only for ease of reference and academic purposes.

FAIR USE Notice All rights to these copyrighted items are reserved. Articles and graphics have been placed within for educational and discussion purposes only, in compliance with 'Fair Use' criteria established in Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976. The principle of 'Fair Use' was established as law by Section 107 of The Copyright Act of 1976. 'Fair Use' legally eliminates the need to obtain permission or pay royalties for the use of previously copyrighted materials if the purposes of display include 'criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, and research.' Section 107 establishes four criteria for determining whether the use of a work in any particular case qualifies as a 'fair use'. A work used does not necessarily have to satisfy all four criteria to qualify as an instance of 'fair use'. Rather, 'fair use' is determined by the overall extent to which the cited work does or does not substantially satisfy the criteria in their totality. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes of your own that go beyond 'fair use,' you must obtain permission from the copyright owner. For more information go to: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>

THIS DOCUMENT MAY CONTAIN COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL. COPYING AND DISSEMINATION IS PROHIBITED WITHOUT PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNERS.

Source: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>

[Return to Top](#)